Appearances Are Deceiving
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Rating:
General Audiences

Archive Warning:
No Archive Warnings Apply

Category:
Gen

Fandom:
僕のヒーローアカデミア | Boku no Hero Academia | My Hero Academia

Relationship:
Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead/Yamada Hizashi | Present Mic, Class 1-A & Midoriya Izuku, Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead & Class 1-A, Midoriya Izuku & Todoroki Shouto, Midoriya Izuku & Shinsou Hitoshi, Midoriya Izuku & Shigaraki Tomura | Shimura Tenko, The Hatsumes & Izuku, Kirishima Eijirou & Midoriya Izuku, Midoriya Izuku & Sasaki Mirai | Sir Nighteye, Midoriya Izuku & Toogata Mirio, Bakugou Katsuki & Uraraka Ochako, Todoroki Shouto & Yamada Hizashi | Present Mic, Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead & Midoriya Izuku, Kurogiri & Midoriya Izuku, Dr. Tsubasa & Sensei | All For One, Bakugou Katsuki & Midoriya Izuku, Bakugo Katsuki/Consequences, Izumi Kouta & Midoriya Izuku

Character:
Midoriya Izuku, Bakugou Katsuki, Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead, Yamada Hizashi | Present Mic, Hatsume Mei, Yagi Toshinori | All Might, Shinsou Hitoshi, Class 1-A (My Hero Academia), Todoroki Shouto, Shigaraki Tomura | Shimura Tenko, Kurogiri (My Hero Academia), Original Characters, Sasaki Mirai | Sir Nighteye, Hatsume Mei's Family, Sensei | All For One, Dr. Tsubasa (My Hero Academia), Eri (My Hero Academia)

Additional Tags:
Midoriya Izuku Has a Quirk, BAMF Midoriya Izuku, BAMF Hatsume Mei, Hatsume Mei is a Good Friend, Hatsume Mei & Midoriya Izuku Friendship, Protective Hatsume Mei, Uraraka Ochako is a Good Friend, BAMF Uraraka Ochako, Suicidal Thoughts, Bullying, Abusive Relationships, Angst, Violence, Fluff, Izuku and Shigaraki

met as kids, low self esteem y'all, Death, Angry Bakugou Katsuki, Panic Attacks, Protective Shinso Hitoshi, Kirishima Eijirou is a Good Friend, BAMF Yaoyorozu Momo, i made momo the prez bc she deserves it, platonic relaionships, mentions of abuse, Parental Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead, Parental Yamada Hizashi | Present Mic, Shinsou Hitoshi Replaces Mineta Minoru, Unhealthy Relationships, Touch-Starved Midoriya Izuku, Queerplatonic Relationships, Adopted Midoriya Izuku, Adopted Shinsou Hitoshi, Protective Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead, Implied/Referenced Human Experimentation, Suspected Traitor Midoriya Izuku, does this count as nomu deku?, lil bit of torture, Fake Quirk Science

Language:
English

Collections:
BNHA fics that stop me from sleeping, Genius bnha fanfics, 僕のヒーローアカデミア - (読み返す [よみかえす]), Updating, Creative Chaos Discord Recs, ☆ Little Red's BNHA Library ☆, Bnha titles that were definitely worth my sleepless nights, A Picky Reader’s Top Picks, Stories That Are Cool, Sven's Absolute Top Fics, best bnha fics i’ve had the privilege of reading, Just sum of ma fav broccoli boi fic, bnha fics i dream about 🌙, Got 99 problems but these ain't one, Void's BNHA Favorites :D, Unpleasant's MHA Recommendations, bnha fics <3, The best of mha on ao3, Izuku and his Collection of Dads, crispyminiz favs, bnha dekuism, 🍀GOAT FICS feat: My Hero Izuku🍀, Fanfiction *I* Deem Worthy Of The Name, a good read if i say so myself, bnha fanfics that i would take a bullet for, great reads, an aroace's favourite fics!, Don’t Forget These Fics, soul healing comes from fanfiction, You haven’t lived if you haven’t read this, Banco Fic, In-Progress I Want To Read, i love these!! (theyre my faves), Magnolia's Favourite Fics, isabella9792_readinglist, The Reasons For My Insomnia, Fics I've Read That Are Longer Than Pride and Predjudice, saviors of aerois :>, BaNHAmmer, Most favorite works (GoSleep_NoThatSoInteresting), T.S.S (This shit slaps), Fics recommended by lunakaiii on tik tok, .⋆˚.•*.↩My Bebu multiverse♡♡↬.*•.˚⋆., Leannic Recs, Favorite BNHA Fics ❤, BEST BOI IZUKU_top BNHA works, mort's bnha favorites!!, From the Vault, MHA_fanfics_because_idk, fics that kept me staring at my screen all night, Long Fics to Binge, Quality Fics, my heart is here, My Hero Academia Fics To Cleanse Your Soul ♨, Bnha fanfic who has my heart, Nicee, Mage735’s reading list, ✧Wan Shi Tong's Library✧, FreakingAmazingFics, Dadzawa Vibes, I’m manly enough to admit I cried reading these

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by orphan_account

Summary

Silence stretched for what felt like hours in the observation room, none of them unfazed enough to make an utterance.

Midnight promptly broke it with an astonished “Holy shit,” as one of the stronger applicants lifted Midoriya off of the torn up street, per Chiyo’s request.

“Teachers of UA,” Nedzu addressed, feeling quite giddy. “Meet Midoriya Izuku, our top scorer in both the practical and written exams.” Nedzu rolled the video back to Izuku standing in the dust, the girl leaning heavily against him as he stared at the Zero-pointer with determination instead of fear.

Notes

MHA FIC!!

I'm so happy with the beginning
Really though, the serotonin is HERE

I do not own MHA or its characters

Never Meet Your Heroes

Chapter Notes

Edit: 11/6/2020
Edit:2/3/2021

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Midoriya Izuku stared at the charred remnants of his notebook as the wind ruffled the water-warped pages. He clenched his teeth to stave off tears. Another notebook destroyed, this time his dreams dashed along with it. For the first time in a long time, he thought about not buying a new one. He thought about leaving this reminder of his hopes, his aspirations, his *everything,* at the top of this building. Because maybe he didn't want to stand up again, only for the next person he came across to tell him he shouldn't shoot for the stars. Maybe he didn't want to be told that, even with his gadgets, even with his intelligence, Midoriya Izuku's dream was nothing more than that.

A dream.

Izuku drew in a shuddering breath. A drowning feeling of resignation weighed on his shoulder, settling in the pit of his stomach. Hadn't he known this all along?

"What did you do?"

Hadn't he been told this a million times over by every single person he knew?

"Is that thing even my son?"

Hadn't his own parents told him?

"That- That quirk's not- it's-"

What was it they called him?

"-villainous,"

With a glance at his surroundings, he distantly realized that he had reached the edge of the roof now. His brain brought him half an idea, a taunt.

“Take a swan dive off the roof of a building,”

And wouldn’t it be so easy, Izuku thought to himself as he watched cars move down the road, unaware of his internal plight. It wasn’t like Kacchan brought up something he hadn’t already thought of before. He knew he was worthless. Izuku had no one. He had nothing but memories of people who abandoned him. Nothing but an empty apartment and a lonely beach.

He stepped closer, putting his hands on the railing. *To get a better view,* the terrified part of his mind soothed as he leaned forward. Vertigo hit him subtly, his vision tipping as he did, the flat edge of the rail pressing uncomfortably into the skin of his exposed palms. The backs of his feet lifted off the ground, the wind kissed his neck lightly, a whistle, not a roar, as he started falling forward to- to-

Ripping himself away from the ledge, away from his poisonous thoughts, a wave of nausea hit him. Knees buckling underneath him, his hands hit the concrete to stop him from falling completely, scraping across the floor as his elbows gave out, too. *God,* what- what had he been about to do? Izuku gasped for air, feeling deprived of it, and scrambled back to his backpack, to his notebook. Every inch of him shaking, he shoved the ruined notebook inside his bag, not caring that he was destroying it further, and bolted down the stairwell that All Might left through.

He tried not to let himself think about the distant explosion, the thing that broke him out of his trance, the only reason he was stumbling down these stairs instead of- of-

Bile burned in his throat as he finally reached the bottom of the stairs. Breath hitching, legs burning, hands trembling, he ran.

He ran until another explosion brought him out of his terror-filled haze. The crowd obscured his view and he realized that his feet had led him to another hero fight.

A glimpse of an all too familiar swamp-green.

No, he begged, pushing his way through the crowd. *Please don’t let it be-*

The sludge villain.

And the heroes. The heroes were just *standing there.* Izuku turned his gaze back to the villain, to the victim it took, and remembered the

feeling of slime forcing itself down his throat, of suffocating-

The sludge writhed as another explosion boomed within him, turning to reveal the face of his new victim. Desperate, blood-red eyes met his and Izuku didn't have to think. He didn't need to do anything but move.

Shouts followed him as he rushed past every bystander. He could care less that this was dangerous, he could care less about himself. If he had died in that underpass, they wouldn't even be in this situation. When his backpack collided with his body, the villain turned, eyes gleaming with rage when they fell upon him, the boy who All Might saved.

Kacchan heaved in a gasp of air.

Izuku didn't stop, though, because one gulp of air was not enough to save him. Lifting a thousand-pound weight off of a locked box in his chest, Izuku reached inside himself, as he sunk his bare hands into the slime, and *pulled,* ignoring the nausea that rolled over him at the feeling of his hands being encased in sludge, ignoring the reminder of his own near-death experience.

The sludge villain fell still and Izuku could almost hear the silence of the crowd behind him over the roaring in his ears. Energy he hadn't felt in years flooded him, dizzying him. Heat furled in his core and stars danced in his clouding vision.

This was the feeling of something he pretended he didn't have, something he didn't *want.*

This was the feeling of a quirk.

A genetic mutation, Izuku would later find out upon his own research. Unique from his mother's telekinesis and his father's- he shuddered (at the reminder of his father or the slow ache overcoming him?)- fire-breathing.

Initiated by physical contact, not limited by five finger activation, his quirk put people in their own heads and forced them to agonize over their own flaws. Insecurity, he dubbed it quietly, where no one would ever hear the name.

(Reminders of how he obtained such information made the ache building in his head worsen.)

It manifested when he was touching his parents. They froze at some point during the movie they were watching, and only when Izuku moved to use the restroom did they snap out of his quirk. A fight broke out. The movie had been an act of goodwill from his mother, a silent, tense ordeal to distract his father.

Evidently, the night was not as subdued as they hoped it would be.

“That hellspawn is not my child!”

After his father left, she could barely stomach a glance at him. Before, they shared the pain, they were in it together. Apparently, that stopped the night his quirk manifested.

They never told anyone about his quirk.

She told him that he was quirkless and he didn’t deny it, not when it was the first time she had properly looked him in the eyes since that night.

“What the hell, Deku?” Kacchan’s snapping voice tugged him back into reality. A reality where blood dripped down his nose and every inch of him ached.

The pro heroes *finally* moved and All Might, that- that fucking *bastard,* shouted something about having empty soda bottles.

Izuku didn’t wait around to see what they would do to him for interfering.

The moment their eyes turned away from him, Izuku faded into the background. He had always been good at that.

His feet predictably led him to Dagobah beach. Why was it that he never failed to wander back here when things became especially unbearable? Why, when bittersweet memories stab his fragile heart every time he sees the glittering view of the sunset?

For the second time that day, Izuku leaned against a railing, this time for support.

He didn’t even realize he was falling until his back hit the sand.

Katsuki hated the way his throat couldn’t get rid of the feeling of that

sludge fucker's slime squirming down his esophagus. He hated that, no matter how much he spit, the taste of that disgusting slime wouldn't go away.

But, he hated Deku more than any of that.

The nerd had a quirk. A fucking *quirk.* The weakling had been looking down at him this whole time, huh? Laughing behind his back every time he called him quirkless?

He brushed off the heroes, hell, he brushed off *All Might's* quick check on him before reporters swarmed him, and ran after that damned nerd. Katsuki needed answers and he wasn't afraid to beat them out of Deku.

His malice stalled, when he caught sight of the blood trail he followed, but returned when he thought of the likely cause. *Fucking freak lied to me,* his inner voice snarled.

Deku was at the garbage beach, or all fucking places, leaning against the railing and casting a shadow from the sunset in front of him.

"Oi, Deku!"

Katsuki's smug grin froze when Deku fell forward and over the railing without so much as a glance back. *The trash,* his mind thought frantically as he darted forward. *What if he fell on something and impaled himself? Seemed like something his dumbass would do-*

To a suppressed amount of relief, he caught sight of Deku laying in the sand like an idiot. Landing on the sand next to him with a thud, he grabbed a handful of the nerd's collar to yell at him, only for the blood to drain from his face when he realized he wasn't breathing.

"□amnit, *BREATHE, YOU BASTARD!"*

Something slammed into his chest like a freight train and Izuku lurched up, gagging on the copper-tasting liquid in his throat. Blood spewed carelessly from his mouth as he coughed and his body hit someone else's.

"The fuck was that, Deku?" Izuku inhaled sharply, throwing him into another coughing fit. "So you were hiding your quirk this whole damn

time? Is that it?" He prodded over Izuku's receding spasms.

"K-Ka-Kacchan," he stuttered, mouth thick with blood.

"Don't *Kacchan* me," the boy hissed, pushing Izuku off of him with a surprising lack of force. He stood, glaring down at him as sand clinging to him. "No wonder you wanted to hide your quirk. It's so useless you can't even use it without fucking dying."

Kacchan walked away and Izuku didn't call out to him.

Waking up in the middle of the night, stiff and sore, was hellish and made Izuku groan when he attempted to move. The knife gouging his brain wasn't any help as he stumbled to his feet, but the world didn't stop turning when something like yesterday happened and certainly not for Izuku.

The apartment was as depressing as the morning he left. As the definitely ruined, but maybe salvageable uniform churned in the washing machine, Izuku messed with a small army figure, thinking of his mother.

He tried to steer clear of thoughts concerning her for a multitude of reasons. One, the last day he saw her had been over eight years ago. Two, during the two years she stayed after his father left, she steadily grew colder towards him. And then three, which he added to the list only recently: she finally decided she could stop paying for the apartment. Why would she keep doing it in the first place, you ask? Izuku honestly had no idea. Guilt? Pity? Old time's sake?

She sent in cash a week before rent was due. Always the same amount, which exceeded the actual cost of the bills since he rarely used half of the utilities. The landlady took the bills without looking up from her spreadsheet and never asked him where his mother was. Who cared, after all, when he was the only tenant who never pushed for another week to gather their money? The most Ms. Taira would do was thank him for not being a "little bitch like all the other shitheads I house,", which Izuku chose to take as a compliment.

He saved the money, what he could of it at least, and planned on using it to pay for UA's tuition. Izuku had been saving money all his life, his clothes, his shoes, hell, the untamable, bird's nest on his head, was proof of his frugal ways. Sturdy trainers, patched clothes, cheap

food, odd jobs, Izuku would do anything to earn money and *keep* it. UA might have been a hero school with a fair price range for their tuition fees but that didn't mean the price wasn't steep.

This, sadly, was the reason he sold his hero merch, All Might memorabilia included, a week ago. Even though parting with it caused something to shrivel in his heart, even if the guy was an asshole, he still loved heroes. Aside from that, anything with economical value in the apartment had been sold long ago, leaving him with a barren residence and a meager amount of objects with sentimental value.

But, by god, it had been worth it.

Izuku was in the final stretch. At this rate, he would actually be able to attend UA if he passed the exams. He just had to stay low and hope nothing fucking tried him because if something sent him to the hospital it would be a shitshow in more ways than one.

Rent, he could manage, especially with that new metal and mechanics shop opening up a few miles out. Food, psh, he had been living off simple food for years. Tuition, in the bag, so long as he didn't break somebody's million yen car or something.

Things felt kind of… great, actually.

Sure, Izuku had been, well, *dead* a few hours ago but damnit, he was alive now and this wild aspiration of his truly had a chance of becoming real.

The army figure in his scarred palm, small and colors flecking off from age, pressed against his skin. It offered reassurance and doubt but ultimately, the pleasant memories won this time.

A week later, when he heard the metal and mech shop opened, Izuku gathered his collection of usable parts and cleaned them meticulously. There were no other shops in the area that he could go to sell these things so he couldn't afford for them to turn him away. Literally.

Kacchan left him alone, aside from the occasional fiery glare, and the others stopped asking questions on account of that signature 'Kacchan glare' being turned on them when they stepped too close.

Something inside him writhed, the churning like a pot of boiling water

overflowing. The overflowing bit especially. It was like a fish in his grip, slippery, and thrashing to escape. And like hell he would let it. Things were going well, thank you, and he did not need his jacked-up quirk fucking up his plans. The constant aching was the icing on the cake and the piercing headaches were the cherry on top of it.

That was a reasonable reaction, though, Izuku supposed. Dying seemed a little extreme but he had kept his quirk locked up for eight years. Was this what withdrawal felt like? The manifestation of his quirk hurt but this was another level of danger.

The banner on the inside of the windowed wall said: *Now Open!* In big, curvy, red and orange font. A bell chimed pleasantly when he pushed into the building, the box heavy in his lithe arms.

The room he walked into housed bland, off-white walls decorated with succulents and objects standing out with bright color. Blue padded chairs lined the wall, the counter at the other side of the room reaching both ends of the wall. A gate and latch remained closed and everything felt utterly new. Overall, it was your cliché receptionist room. His mouth quirked up when he caught sight of the mini Present Mic figure by a similarly situated plastic cockatoo on its perch.

Izuku built a radio because it seemed easier than fixing another phone that actually emitted sound. His phone was a relic, and it looked the part, too. He found it while scavenging and kept it for no reason other than the ridiculous hope that one day someone would want to communicate with him. With the radio, on the other hand, Izuku worked until the voices and melodies came through the speaker clearly.

Present Mic's radio show quickly became one of his most visited stations. He was loud and exuberant, something Izuku could never be. The music he played stayed in Izuku's head for days, humming in his veins and beating with his heart. The man was amusing, too, whipping out subtly snarky remarks and deceiving wit just as much as he said a corny joke.

When *(when* because he could not afford to think *if)* he attended UA, would Izuku meet him? God, how would he cope with meeting him *and* Eraserhead? How would he not faint on the spot when all of his teachers were his literal heroes?

Eraserhead was an Underground hero, so Izuku supposed he maybe shouldn't be aware of him, but he was exactly the hero that Izuku

wanted to be. Out of sight, working primarily in ambush and close-ranged attacks. His quirk erased others but he fought entirely quirkless against mutation quirks, so Izuku could, too, especially with his inventions.

A tall woman with salmon pink hair grinned at him from behind the counter. Her cropped hair, spiked up like it had its own personality, had nothing on her golden eyes. The color dipped into copper and she blinked, her smile becoming more of a show.

Quirk, his brain warned. *She's seeing something she doesn't like.*

Damnit, he wanted to sell her shit, not have a subtle quirk used on him.

"Hi," he said quickly, heaving the box onto the counter. "Do you buy scrap metal and parts?"

She pulled the box closer and rummaged through the organized, flatter pieces of metal to see the parts he brought. "I sure do from you," she said, eyes glued to the contents of the box. The knot in his chest loosened, a sigh of relief passing his lips. Again, her eyes flashed bronze, flicking to him, and he tensed. Her eyes drifted to the exposed scars scaling his left arm and his patience snapped.

"Stop that." He took a step back, hackles rising and his eyes narrowing. "Do you want to buy them or not?"

"Stop what?"

"Using your quirk on a minor without consent," he gritted out. "That's illegal, you know." Not that he would report it. That would require going to the police, who would probably ask for his guardian.

The burly woman laughed, setting him even further on edge. "You're kinda fiery, you know that, green bean?" She produced a pen and clipboard, sliding it across the counter. "I don't know where the hell you found parts like this, but I'd be damn stupid to turn you away. Read the form, write your basic info, sign on the dotted line, blah blah blah."

A rivet of fear speared through him as he sat on one of the chairs and began reading.

"Where're your parents, sprout? They send you over with all this by yourself?"

Bitterness tasted sour in his dry mouth. “Busy,” he muttered, standing and handing over the filled out papers.

“Right.” She tapped the paper with the pen. “Midoriya, you say that cash is the preferred payment. I don’t presently have enough to pay you, so would you prefer digital payment? I don’t think anyone wants to walk around with this much money on them, anyway.”

He glanced at the box, then at her. “How-” he gulped. “How much money do you owe me?” Stupid question, he realized immediately. If she couldn’t pay him right off the bat, then it was a reasonable amount more than he guessed all this was worth. “Nevermind,” he added nervously.

“One, never ask someone what they owe you. People will never pay if they think they can get away with it. Two, I’m guessing you’ve never sold anything like this before. And three, I owe you-”

Izuku’s knees went weak when she told him the number. Oh damn. Oh shit. Oh *fuck.* He laughed, high-pitched and unbelieving, hands rising to do who knows what. That was, oh god, that was way more than he thought he would get for a few sheets of metal and used parts.

Maybe miracles did happen.

“Woah, you good, kid?” His eyes snapped back to the lady. “Kinda blanked out on me for a second.”

“I can wait,” he croaked. “Pay me what you can and I’ll wait for the rest.”

“Alright, give me a second,”

In the apartment, Izuku held his head in his hands, a mad giggle that matched the grin on his face.

“I can make it,” he whispered, breaking the silence. “Fuck the world, I’m making it to UA.”

“At this point, I feel like I should put you down as a business supplier,” Mitsu said as he put down a box full of money-making material for the third time.

He blushed and took the clipboard she offered, signing his name. Izuku would keep coming here and selling what he scavenged and cleaned for as long as she would let him. Tuition fees were a bitch and Izuku didn't have time for debt or interest adding up. He needed enough for three years, and he would pay his way through half of his second year by the end of the summer if he kept this up.

Every Sunday, thirty minutes after they open, Izuku meets Mitsu and they exchange money, metal, and small talk. Mitsu showed off a picture of her wife and daughter, Izuku told her that he built things in his spare time. She pushed, a few times, for information on his parents but relented before he became too uncomfortable.

Mitsu apologized for using her quirk on him without permission and explained her quirk. It was called Current State. When she activated it, her quirk revealed the physical and emotional state of a person to her. After some questioning on his part, Izuku found out that she received her answers through feelings rather than actual words. Mitsu described it as a compass, pointing her in the right direction.

"Oh, hey!" Mitsu burst the fifth time he showed up. "My wife, as you know, works the books, but Mei's coming in today to work on her inventions. They're dying to meet you, so feel free to come back around one-ish."

Internally, he balked. The short interactions he had here with Mitsu still kept them at acquaintance level. Coming in and meeting her family would break that barrier, that protective wall of security.

Part of him, a traitorous, longing part, wanted to. Save for Mitsu, no one spoke kindly with him. No one turned their gaze upon him as if he mattered. His brain whispered that they might be like her, like Mitsu, instead of his mom.

"I'll see if I can make it," Izuku mumbled, not missing how Mitsu lit up.

"Hell yeah!" She shouted after him as he exited the building.

Izuku arrived at one o'clock on the dot and walked in without any preamble, tensing when he realized other people were sitting in the chairs. Right. This was a business and it was the middle of the day. An employee stood in Mitsu's usual spot, looking bored and utterly

uninterested as they lounged in the desk chair. They had a cat quirk, it seemed. Furred, pointed ears that flicked towards the sound of his entrance and slit pupils surrounded by blue irises darted to him.

Lazily, she pressed a button and spoke into a microphone. “Ay, Boss, ya boy’s here,”

Not two seconds later, a girl that looked like Mitsu’s daughter burst into the room and grabbed him by his shoulders to push him further into the building. He gaped at the sheer size of space. Dozens of workers milled about and even more inventions were being tweaked. It was a mechanic’s heaven.

“Hi, I’m Hatsume Mei!” She shouted into his ear over the sudden whir of machinery. “Future CEO of Hatsume Industries!”

Her hands on his shoulders sent bells ringing in his head, all of them screaming *don’t touch don't touch* but he put his shaking hands into the pockets of his cargo pants and offered her a smile as she practically wheeled him around. “Midoriya,” he yelled.

She let go of him without warning, causing him to shoot forward and stumble. They were in front of a red door.

“Zuzu, open the door!”

Promptly, he flushed red, eyes blowing wide. “W-What?” He asked breathlessly.

“Open it!”

He wasn’t too sure whether the handle would electrocute him or if this was a normal door because this certainly wasn’t a normal girl. Still, he opened the door to reveal a smaller workspace with tables and stations. Mitsu and her wife looked over, their hands dropping from where they previously gestured with them.

Ayumi looked the same as she did in the picture Mitsu showed him. Her eyes and braided hair shone, bright and silver, a stark contrast to her dark skin. Thin gray lines on her neck displayed the gills she could utilize. Her ears were fin-like and webbed, like her fingers, fanning out when they entered the room.

“You came!” Mitsu cheered, rushing over with her wife. “Meet my wife, Ayumi, and my daughter, Mei!”

Ayumi waved a webbed hand, smiling softly. She gestured with her hands again and Izuku watched with curiosity.

“Yumi says it’s nice to meet you, Midoriya.”

He looked at her sharply, then back to Ayumi’s hands. “That’s a language?”

All of them let out a laugh, making him redden. Mitsu nodded, though. “Yeah, kid. Japanese Sign Language, or JSL for short. Ayumi’s quirk only lets her talk underwater so all of us know it.”

“Really? Would it be clear underwater? Or maybe garbled? Can you breathe underwater, too? Wait, you have gills, sorry. Are you able to withstand water pressure if you go deep? Do your ears help you hear better above and under the water? Or just one of those? Do your gills seal when you’re out of water? Do you have a preference for salt or freshwater? Does it matter at all? What about-”

“See, I told you,” Mitsu grinned. “He’s a riot.”

Ayumi smiled weakly, looking at him as if he was an enigma. Mei, on the other hand, lit up and began vibrating.

“Mom, you didn’t tell me he asked *those* questions!” She cried out in betrayal. “We could have made so many babies by now if I had known!”

Izuku blinked, then promptly turned red, stepping back. He glanced at Mistu, who appeared exasperated, and Ayumi, who was having the time of her life, laughing silently.

“Hatsume Mei,” she began tiredly. “Explain yourself before he passes out.”

“They’re my inventions!” She shouted, grabbing his shoulders and putting her face inches from his. “Mom says you invent things and bring premium scrap. I’m keeping you.”

Mei did, actually, ‘keep’ him, in her own way.

She began showing up when he dropped off his weekly findings and proceeded to drag him into her workshop to ask his opinion on her

babies.

“See, if I can just figure out how to disregard the laws of gravity, then my baby will take flight,”

“Why don’t you just do away with the propellers and put in the hover tech that the Shield company makes?” Izuku questioned, thinking of the parts he had previously brought in. “If they’re accessible in some way, I could probably find you the parts by the time I come back-”

Only with the strength of weeks of sifting through and hauling pounds of scrap metal was he able to stay upright when Mei slammed into him, stealing him into a suffocating hug. He tensed, feeling her skin connect with his, and shoved down the panic that shot up at the contact. The clothes he wore scratched against one of Kacchan’s latest burns but he held in the resulting hiss.

The scars on his left arm tingled, unused to the amount of pressure her arm put on them.

“Are you going to UA?” Mei asked, somewhat hopefully, when she released him.

The question sounded so different coming from her. She wasn’t asking it to mock him or put him down.

Mei was asking him because she *wanted* him to go.

“Yes, I am.” Goosebumps erupted over his skin when her face broke out into a glorious grin. Happy. Mei was happy that he wanted to go to UA.

The first time he brought them all the Dagobah, it had been upon Mei’s incessant nagging and pleading. Ayumi and Mitsu were curious, too, so they had decided against fighting Mei’s will.

Their jaws collectively dropped when he threw his arm out with a weak ‘tada’. To be fair, at this point, he had cleared out half the beach on his own.

Sometimes, when the thought of returning to the apartment became unbearable, Izuku holed up inside a pile. A part of him, desperate and longing, hoped to catch a glimpse of purple mist and glowing yellow

eyes, but he often pushed those thoughts aside. Izuku took the Hatsumes to the other side of the beach where they were unlikely to search far enough to find his hideout.

It had been a month since they all officially met, and since then Izuku had taken up Ayumi's, admittedly surprising, offer to help him learn how to fight. They had an entire room in their house dedicated for training and Izuku was never one to pass up such an amazing opportunity handed to him on a silver platter.

"This-" Mitsu gestured wildly at the mounds of garbage. "-is where you get all your scrap?"

Ayumi tugged Mei off of the railing before she could fall over it and turned to him with careful curiosity. *"So you rummage around all this, clean it, and bring it to us to sell?"* she signed slowly, letting him catch the words as she made them.

Izuku, who did little else with his time other than study, analyze, tinker, and haul garbage, had begun learning sign language. Having a conversation with someone, through somebody else's translation could be a hassle and Izuku wanted to be able to speak with her.

"I wish my moms would let me soft through scrap metal all day," Mei whined.

Both of her moms stiffened, glancing at each other as Mei pulled Izuku down to the beach by his arm.

"Where are his parents?" Mitsu said aloud idly in concern.

Ayumi frowned, watching Izuku pull Mei out of the way of a tilting trash pile. *"We should ask if we could meet them later."*

Mitsu grumbled, leaning against the railing to face the city. "Already tried a few times, Yumi. He shuts me down faster each time I bring it up."

Ayumi clicked her tongue in annoyance, joining her wife on the railing. *"He must have a lot of free time, to learn enough of JSL to hold a proper conversation with me, bring in his own gadgets, and collect all of his findings to bring to us."*

Mitsu turned to face the ocean, observing as Izuku pushed a pile of collapsing trash to the side, where it clattered loudly. "It's dangerous out here." She chewed the inside of her cheek. "What parent in their

right mind would let their kid do this? I would certainly not be trusting enough to let Mei run around with a bunch of strangers all day."

"It would be easy to conclude that he has subpar parents then, no?"

"Sure, but… I just don't wanna assume, y'know?" She twirled their keys on her fingers by the ring. "What if they're busy people or they're trying to be good parents?"

Ayumi raised a hand to Mitsu's face, turning her head to face her. She smiled gently. *"Then we should decide what to think when we meet them."*

Being able to wear gloves again turned out to be a godsend. He used to wear them when he was little and his mom would throw them into his face, horrified at the mere idea of having to touch him, but Kacchan exploded the safeguard once he noticed them. Izuku couldn't give him a response when he asked why stupid Deku wanted to wear gloves in the middle of spring, and *bam,* bye-bye gloves.

The only solution to that became focusing on keeping his quirk locked away and never *ever* touching anyone for any reason.

With the Hatsumes though, he felt the safety of gloves settle back into place.

Izuku's mind wandered to thoughts of his quirk too easily lately. He doubted it was strong. How could it be, after years of disuse? The repercussions of using it alone made his resolve to never use it cement itself further.

Questions loomed in the back of his head, though. Queries about his quirk because how could he resist when he analyzed the quirks of others so deeply? With every notebook he finished, every quirk he scrutinized, Izuku realized that there had to be more to his quirk than he concluded. The tiny shred of information he had, information that *he* hadn't even garnered, could be the tip of the iceberg. His mind whirred with possibilities and questions that he refused to find the answers to.

That was where his knowledge ended and Izuku knew that there was more.

Could he import himself into the person's mind? If so, could he interact with them, or would he be a spectator? Could the person rationalize and accept that, yeah they're flawed, but dammit everyone is? Would his quirk still hold them inside their mindscape? How long could he hold a willing volunteer? What about a villain who wanted out?

Stop it, he berated himself. *This quirk is never going to be used.*

His questions would go unanswered. He could be a great hero- without his quirk.

All Might's voice echoed in his head, his words forever branded into his psyche. *"You can't be a hero."*

Fucking watch me, he snarled back.

UA exams were tomorrow.

Mei planned on applying for a spot in the Support course and Izuku wished her future teacher luck. He knew she would scare the shit out of students and faculty alike. God, he could already picture the face of some poor Support student as she grabbed them by the shoulders, shouting, "Do you want to make babies with me?"

For Izuku, the Hero course was his only route. When he initially did research on the physical and written portions of the exam, Izuku had been shocked by how much the physical exam favored those with flashy quirks. Fighting against robots was meant for people with quirks like All Might's or Kacchan's. What about people whose quirk relied on people? A torrent of anger flickered through him. Did the faculty seriously think that physical quirks were the only useful ones? It seemed a little hypocritical when two of the teachers would have had to claw their way into the Hero course.

What had Midnight done, when her quirk was of no use against towering machines? What had Eraserhead done, when there were no quirks to erase?

The guidelines of UA only recently changed to allow quirkless students in, but only a few years prior had they begun allowing people to apply for the use of homemade support items to use in their exams.

How many students fell through the cracks because of their implicit bias?

In the morning, Izuku picked at the vibrant tones of color on his nails that Ayumi painted on him a few days prior and checked his mental list.

Clothes; check.

Granola bar; check.

Keys; check.

Backpack; check.

Said backpack was the most interesting part of the items he carried with him out to the car that the Hatsumes were currently sitting in. Mei roughly pulled him inside, her excitement bleeding into her strength. Both of them were built like brick walls at this point, from having to haul machinery around Dagobah and the shop.

“Have everything you need?” Mitsu inquired as he buckled in.

“Yep,” he nodded.

Mei grabbed his face with both of her hands, pulling him nose to nose with her. “Zuzu,” she started, sounding far more serious than he has ever heard her. “Are you ready to stick it to the UA faculty?”

“Hell yeah, MeiMei.”

Ayumi snorted, glancing at Mitsu, who shrugged at the silent accusation. He rarely cursed when they were first becoming comfortable around each other but after nine months around them all, he could curse enough to make Kacchan blush.

The ride passed quickly, their departure onto the walkways that led to UA full of hugs and encouragement.

At the stairs, he glanced back, briefly meeting Kacchan’s eyes. He was bundled up in nice clothes, clothes far nicer than anything Izuku ever owned, and stalked down the path silently. His eyes narrowed at Izuku and he hastily looked back at Mei, who continued her rant on how bogus one of her mothers’ competitor’s prices were for their services.

“I’d say good luck,” Mei started, a grin forming on her features. “But

you don't need it!" She slapped him on the back, practically knocking the air out of him, and skipped away to find the Support course exams.

During the written exams, he found himself intrigued by the fact that there were optional open-ended questions. They surrounded his thoughts on their current society and touched base with the morality of having 'hero' schools such as UA.

He reached the end of the page and raised his hand. Ectoplasm, or perhaps an Ectoplasm clone, floated over to him. He asked if he could have more paper. Maybe-Ectoplasm provided it within a minute and stayed silent.

Afterward, Izuku grabbed his backpack and made his way to a specified room, led by a Maybe-Ectoplasm.

Maybe-Ectoplasm didn't enter with him into the dark room. A few lights allowed him to see the silhouettes of several people sitting at a long table. The ominous effect given off by their shadowed faces didn't do shit for his confidence but he set his backpack on the table provided for him and set himself into his fuck-it-I'll-show-you mode that Mei managed to find out about. When she did, she didn't want to let him crawl back into his shell and lose that fire she caught a glimpse of. It was more than what she usually saw. There was anger in it, ugly emotions that Izuku rarely expressed.

"You've come to present us with support gear to use in your practical exam." a monotone voice drawled from the center of the table.

There were no questions. Just a prompt. A simple invitation.

Izuku refused to stutter, and, for once, he didn't. These people would listen to him. He needed them to allow him to use his support items.

He brandished his multi-purpose knife first, explaining each tool. He had a feeling he caught their attention when he provided a demonstration of the jet of flames that the tiny thing could produce. From there, he segwayed beautifully into his gun and the bombs he would be shooting out of it. The transition from those to his shoes was slightly less smooth, but it wasn't absolutely horrendous, so he counted it as a win.

The explanation of the physical exams passed without much fanfare. Well, aside from the fact that he was seated directly beside Kacchan and got called out in front of an amphitheater of people for mumbling

about Present Mic.

In his t-shirt and shorts, Izuku loaded his gun and holstered it at his thigh. He flipped through his multi-tool and kicked the heels of his shoes together, testing their functionality.

His shoes were made to increase mobility and provide some extra support for when he fired his gun. Knockback was a bitch and he braced his arms for it, thankful for the Hatsumes' guidance in making them. They could hover and shoot him into the air if needed but there was more experimentation to be had before any confidence could truly set in. Propelling seemed like the best choice to not chance his feet being blown up and he told the people at the table that something could go wrong.

Safety before pride.

He knew impressions were important and that even if he couldn't see the people at the table they could most certainly see *him* but being cocky and injuring himself after hyping himself up would be disappointing for the judges who would decide his fate.

The shoes were really the only thing in his arsenal that he warned them about. The gun definitely could be considered a risk but it was heat and hard impact that triggered an explosion. Heat produced when the gun fired and hard impact given when it smacked into something. The pouch at his hip was lined with a cooling system that didn't catch too much attention when he showed it off but it was vital to not blasting himself to smithereens.

Mei's machines tended to blow up and have bulk, but Izuku's were more discreet and had a stripe of rainbow. The shoes, for example, were dark in color, with flames of color rising on the sides.

The bombs were a complex brew composed of ingredients that Mei squealed at. When put together it created a slime-like substance that solidified when frozen and blew up in a surprisingly big explosion for the ammo being the size of a large marble. The gun shot them specifically and could hold up to ten at a time without blowing up. In a small bag that weighed heavily against Izuku's hip, he kept the rest of his ammunition. The gun, per Mei's nagging, was mostly black but (and this was the product of her incessant warnings that someone would hate the lack of color on his baby) there were strips of rainbow running from the butt of the handle, up the barrel and to the muzzle. It resembled a very large Glock.

“Gay Glock, gay shoes,” Mei listed off, peering over his shoulder as he tweaked his inventions.

“Gay gadgets,” Izuku concluded.

“Gay life,” Mei retorted, pumping her fist against his.

An alarm sounded without warning and Izuku shot off instantly, his shoes propelling him into the faux city and leaving the other examinees in the dust. In the Hatsume house, if you didn’t have reflexes, you *died.* Izuku lost count of all the times he had nearly been impaled, burned, slashed, blinded, dumped in water, electrocuted- He could go on.

Present Mic’s voice shook them from their stupor, sending the lot of them running after him.

Tackling the head of the nearest robot, he practically tore off the piece of metal protecting its wiring. A quick scan and he jabbed at the robot’s insides, his shoes flinging him back in time for it to explode. He grinned and shot deeper into the city.

“Wouldn’t the explosives he showed us be more effective?” All Might asked aloud, several of the staff around him nodding as they watched the boy ricochet from robot to robot. Nedzu eyed the boy who leaped from machine to machine, charging at them and only utilizing a simple tool to take apart robots that even some with destructive power balked at. His gun remained holstered to his thigh, his ammunition at his hip.

“He has a limited amount of firepower. If he used it all in the beginning there might be nothing left to rapidly increase his score in the last half.” Nedzu wiggled in his seat, watching as the boy helped another student out from under a collapsed robot. When he saw that the child was fine Midoriya Izuku ran off with a bid of good luck.

The teachers around him inched away when they caught sight of the grin on his face. There was a reason some humans thought of him as a bear, after all. Nedzu picked up the sheets of paper Midoriya turned in, one among many who attempted his optional questions, but his views were controversial, bordering on radical.

Nedzu designed his questions in a way from them to be taken in many

directions.

What do you think of society as it is?

What is your opinion on 'hero' schools?

Two simple questions that garnered varying responses that were ultimately, and boringly, the same.

But Nedzu was pleasantly surprised when Ectoplasm handed him the papers of the children who answered his questions.

He especially liked the answer to his first question, as morality had never his strong suit.

The society of 'heroes' and 'villains' that we have created is unsustainable. It is toxic. We see this best in the Symbol of Peace. For now, because of him, we are able to enjoy an era where crime is at an all-time low, but what happens when the Symbol is gone? What happens when he inevitably retires? There will be a surge of crime, a wave of emboldened criminals that will be undaunted when All Might is not there to keep them in check. Who will we turn to? Endeavor, who has lusted after the Number One slot for decades? There is a reason no one could surpass either of them. No one could pass Endeavor because he is merciless when it comes to achieving his goals. It is displayed in his ruthless methods and notorious rage. All Might is another matter entirely. He remained beyond reach because he works without stopping. Remember that month All Might vanished and everyone panicked? Even then, there had been a rise in local crime all around.

Touching on Endeavor's behavior, therein lies another flaw. Being a hero does not mean the same thing it did during the Vigilante era or beforehand. It is an occupation. Hero schools are where roves of children are sent to attempt to become heroes or support them (i.e. business/marketing courses, Support, or General Education, where the majority of Hero course rejects end up)

Someone I knew as a child, my best friend even, manifested a powerful, flashy quirk. Like a flipped switch, he was surrounded by yes-men and praised in abundance for his accomplishments. People turned blind eye to anything he did that could be considered wrong because of his quirk. They said, "He'll be a great hero with a quirk like that." and that was it. Because his quirk was suited for heroism, that made him a hero. Heroes don't use their quirks on other children for fun or belittle everyone around them. No one should label a child a hero, not with what that word means nowadays.

And since heroism has been broken from its definition, it isn't a far leap to say that the term 'villain' has as well.

What about the children with not so flashy quirks, not so heroic, or 'useful'? Every day, I see and hear people throw around the words 'hero' and 'villain'. I think of the man Endeavor maimed for stealing a bag of groceries, of the woman who was arrested for vigilantism because she used her quirk on a bank robber. Villains, people labeled them.

That man stole because his family was starving because of the high tax rates. Tax rates that will only continue to rise because heroes cause collateral damage wherever they go. Think of Mount Lady, who destroys entire streets each time she uses her quirk. Think of Death Arms, who regularly bashes in walls.

That woman's quirk was Ventriloquist. She took control of the ten robbers the moment she was given the chance and held them until the police arrived, in turn suffering from severe quirk exhaustion. When she was discharged from the hospital a few days later, the police arrested her for illegal quirk usage. I won't disparage the police for arresting her for illegal quirk use, the problem is that this situation isn't original. Many other people have quirks that, with the right forethought, could save them from a similar situation. And that's exactly what happened. Another woman with a quirk that could trap people in bubbles with a touch and make them float pulled the same thing and saved a jewelry store full of people. She got a slap on the wrist while the other woman is spending several years in jail.

I think of the children born powerful, like my friend, and wonder what happens if they don't want to be a hero, wonder if they are given a proper choice. I think of those with quirks like Ventriloquist, who are forced to claw their way up the latter when others are given an escalator.

And what about those who fall? What do you think happens to the outcasts and so-called freaks, who give up?

They become what everyone has always said they would become.

What is a hero without a villain? They have no meaning. Hero society creates more villains that it will ever be able to fight. It has created a stigma around those with less desirable quirks and it has put people into boxes.

Hero. Villain. Civilian.

The world we live in is made of shades of gray, not clean cut like so many have been led to believe. We are living in an unsustainable world, one that

will come crashing down on us one way or another if we don't make some serious changes.

To say Nedzu was excited would be an understatement.

I anticipate the ripples you'll make with those kinds of thoughts, Midoriya.

Nedzu passed the papers to Shouta and he internally groaned because what devil-child could have possibly caught the rat's attention? He accepted the papers and took note of the fact that it was flipped to the second question.

What do you think of 'hero' schools?

Shouta wasn't sure if he wanted to read something that gave Nedzu that kind of glint in his black, beady little eyes, but he suppressed a sigh and read the answer.

Hero schools, while necessary in the current time we are in, are schools that facilitate the idea of creating child soldiers. There is a reason that there has been debate on whether or not to have them. The hero career is one that not just anyone can take up. Students apply for the Hero course for noble reasons, others for money, many for fame, but the bottom line is that they are all signing up to be heroes.

Heroes are faced with life or death situations daily, so one would think that training them specifically for those types of situations would benefit them, right? It does, in many ways, prepare the students for their career of choice, but it also puts them in great danger while doing so.

In UA, the Sports Festival is a necessary event to rake in the funds that keep the school running. It brings attention to the school, allows students in other courses to gain attention, and provides Hero students the chance to show off their quirks and get internships. In theory, this is great for everybody, but what about those with quirks that have specifications or limitations? Their weaknesses are being broadcasted for the world to see just as their strengths are. Villains could easily find recordings of past Festivals to analyze the quirks of the latest batch of heroes.

Internships happen when a hero offers to take an apprentice on the job. Hero students signed up for this, yes, but the question of "Should we allow this?" comes into play. Students, children who are fifteen to sixteen years old, are taken out on patrols and face villains with their mentor beside

them. This is after the Sports Festival, which means the students are sent out about a month and a half after they begin Hero school. How much can the teachers cram into their heads in that amount of time? How much can they express and emphasize the seriousness of the job they are being sent out to do?

What happens when a student slips up or can't handle a situation? The government places the lives of civilians in the hands of children. They put these Hero students in the line of fire. There have been deaths during internships-

Shouta stopped reading, turning to glare at Nedzu. He flipped back to Midoriya's previous answer and blinked at it in surprise. He turned to the first page, read the name, and glanced up at the screen, where Midoriya Izuku leaped onto the head of a Two-pointer, saving the boy who had been cornered by three of them. Of course, this was the problem child that came up to them with the request of a bomb-gun and a flame-throwing multi-tool.

Despite the gleam in the principal's eyes, Shouta could feel his lips twitching to form a grin.

He has potential.

Toshinori could not tear his eyes from the boy if he tried to because *there he was.* The child that he saved and who subsequently saved him and another student. Reporters and fans swarmed him the moment the fight was over, keeping him from following the boy for a few minutes. It ended up being too long.

He wondered about the boy's quirk because, on his application, he was registered as quirkless. He wondered what the boy's quirk could be, how terrible he considered it if he was willing to lie on a formal document like this to hide it.

On the rooftop, the boy had asked him, *"Can I be a hero without a quirk?"* and Toshinori said no. Though, watching the boy tear through the robots, seeing the light in his eyes brighter than they were during their last meeting, Toshinori cursed himself.

To put it bluntly, he bungled his first impression. Telling the boy he couldn't be a hero and not half an hour later he was willing to put everything into teaching him and making him his successor.

Midoriya's mood darkened when he told him what he thought was a harsh reality that the boy needed to accept. Toshinori could feel the words crushing him, chafing on his skin and ringing in his ears.

"You can't be a hero,"

His hands curled into fists as Midoriya finally unholstered his gun. The boy hadn't lied when he said the ammunition packed a punch. The first robot to fall victim to an explosion was blasted to pieces to the obvious joy of Midoriya, who smiled and looked down at his gun with pride as he stood alone in a street.

Toshinori chuckled.

He's already proving me wrong.

He counted five more shots before he would have to resort to tearing the robots apart again. If he spaced out the shots or could find a group, maybe he would be able to-

A window shattered as he passed it, the glass grazing the skin on the top of his nose. Izuku flinched at the sound of glass falling onto the street. Rubble left from the destruction of the other examinees shook on the street from the vibrations. Following the noise, he turned onto a street with several other examinees on it. They all faced him, gaping at something behind him in abject horror. One of them screamed and bolted down the street, others following quickly once they snapped out of their shock.

The Zero-pointer stood tall above them all, the deafening grind of its inner mechanics almost muting out everything around him. Izuku stumbled back, ready to high tail it out of that monstrosity's way when he heard a shriek over the Zero-pointer's thunderous movements.

He stopped and scanned the street, ignoring the few who screamed at him to leave. His eyes snagged on a brown-haired girl who alternated from pressing her hand to her mouth to putting her hands on the rubble that had fallen over her, pushing at it desperately. Izuku kicked his shoes against the ground without another thought, propelling himself across the street in the blink of an eye.

He nearly flew past her, the force from his shoes too much, but his

hand caught the edge of the piece trapping her, the jagged rock slicing into his unscarred palm as the hunk of concrete shifted off of her. Ignoring the pain that rocketed through his system, Izuku landed beside the girl as she clawed at the road to get herself further away from the Zero-pointer.

Quirk overuse. Wounds in her leg oozed blood through her leggings. She must have been completely out of it by now.

“I’ll get you out,” Izuku promised her as he lifted her off the ground. He glanced up, his breath catching in his throat when he took in the Zero-pointer’s distance from them. The girl was depending entirely on him to get her out of here, but how would he do that? His shoes were only stable enough to carry him long distances without blowing up. His gun-

His fucking gun.

He let the girl’s weight fall completely against his front, looking at the tiny switch at the handle of the gun with the kind of solemness found at a funeral. “I worked so hard on you, too,” he whined, though the words were lost to everyone but him. He flipped on the emergency switch and hurled it as high and as far as he could.

Not daring to stand still any longer, Izuku held the girl against his chest, twisted, and hurtled down the street as rapidly as his shoes would allow with the weight of two people . His shoes sputtered under their combined weight but the valiantly kept on functioning, aiding in their escape as they pelted down the road.

The explosives went off. He tucked the girl’s head into his shoulder and jumped into the air with a grunt. As soon as the resulting air of the blast reached them it thrust them further away. Izuku kept the girl’s head against his body, glad enough for her when shrapnel dug into his back.

They still had the fall.

The ground was coming too fast and his shoes were busted. The best he could do, he thought grimly as he relinquished his hold on the girl’s head, was break the fall for her. He flipped them in the air so that he would land first and braced for impact. For pain as the robot bits were shoved deeper into his body. The girl let out a scream that barely reached his still-ringing ears and looked frantically at him.

Maybe this is why tuition is so high, Izuku thought as the pain from a bit

of a *giant robot* that had just crushed a *fake city* radiated through his body. His hand throbbed terribly, the pain distracting him from the darkness beginning to cloud the edges of his vision.

“Are you- *hugh*- okay?”

Blinking, he realized that they stopped falling. Weird, Izuku had expected a lot more agony and suffering and whatnot. This was more of a floaty feeling. Perhaps shock was much more of a drug than he realized.

The girl abruptly turned them, sending a wave of nausea coursing through him as they swayed. Swayed…

In the air?

The weightless feeling disappeared without warning and both of them crashed into the asphalt. Izuku coughed, the abrupt irritation of his wounds jolting him out of his daze.

“How’s your leg?” He gulped down the lump in his throat, coughing again because of the dust he inhaled.

Present Mic’s announcement sounded throughout the city, his voice making it through the cotton in his ears. The end of the exam. Izuku hoped he passed.

“Oh my god, your back- *hugh-”*

“‘M fine,” he said as nonchalantly as he could manage. “Jus’ a light stabbing.”

He closed his eyes and blocked out as much as he could. He’d felt things digging into his back before; things were usually explosive when it came to Izuku and Mei, but he’d never experienced having so many things lodged in his back.

Suddenly, but not unbiddenly, relief washed over him and his body untensed. The girl caught his eye and he offered her the best smile he could manage before giving in to the beckoning darkness at the edge of his vision.

Silence stretched for what felt like hours in the observation room,

none of them unfazed enough to make an utterance.

Midnight promptly broke it with an astonished “Holy shit,” as one of the stronger applicants lifted Midoriya off of the torn-up street, per Chiyo’s request.

“You totally thought Nedzu was going to let that thing crush them, didn’t you?”

“I did not!”

Nedzu rewound the video, causing all the chatter to cease as they observed Midoriya’s actions a second time. They watched as the boy turned to run with the others and froze at the sound of Uraraka’s cry. Watched as he scanned the rubble and flew towards her without a second thought and freed her. Getting the rubble off her had been a fluke but everything else? Using his last explosives to stop their biggest threat? Using the resulting blast to propel him and the girl even further? Twisting in the air and planning to shield the girl from the fall with metal sticking out of his back?

“Teachers of UA,” Nedzu addressed, feeling quite giddy. “Meet Midoriya Izuku, our top scorer in both the practical and written exams.” Nedzu rolled the video back to Izuku standing in the dust, the girl leaning heavily against him as he stared at the Zero-pointer with determination instead of fear.

Again, silence struck the staff.

Chapter End Notes

discord

hope the revisions are cool

The Tragic Backstory™

Chapter Notes

Thank you for all the positive feedback! I really appreciate it all

Edit: 11/21/2020

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Consciousness came sluggishly and he awoke to the faint smell of rubbing alcohol. Like a whip cracked against him, he shot up, uncaring of the stings and throbbing the abrupt action caused him. Panic knocked on the doors of his mind, brandishing a key, as he surveyed the white walls and fluorescent lights beaming above him. Voices murmured through a door, their close proximity rubbing coarsely against his instincts.

This must be UA's infirmary, he thought, the cold of the tiles sending goosebumps up his legs as he slid off the bed.

He glanced at the workspace nearby, freezing at the sight of his photo paperclipped to the open folder. Hastily, he approached the desk, rifling through the information they had on him. The Hatsumes were his emergency contacts, he was registered as quirkless, his non-existent medical history.

Izuku backed away from the table, finding nothing out of line, and lamented his t-shirt's absence in the chill of the room. Checking the windows ended up being for naught; there were no latches for him to open the glass panes trapping him from the outside world.

The door, large and menacing, was his only option if he wished to leave. People still spoke on the other end of it, discouraging him from taking either option. Stay, and face them when they came in, or open the door, and hope they allowed him to exit?

The choice was inevitably made for him, his indecision leaving him with too much to think and weigh on.

Rather anticlimactically, an old, tiny woman shuffled into the room, her cane a giant syringe.

"Recovery Girl?" slipped out before he could stop it. Her eyes darted to him and he nearly cursed himself for calling her attention.

Before he could properly begin having an anxiety attack, All Might walked in, effectively cutting off any ramblings he had been about to stutter out. Both of them froze at the sight of each other neither expecting the confrontation.

Recovery Girl, evidently too exasperated or too old to be willing to put up with their antics, waved him back to the bed. “You were unconscious for longer than I thought you would be. Are you sleeping alright?”

He almost laughed at the notion. Izuku hadn’t slept right in eight years, nor had a proper haircut, but it must have shown on his face because he bonked him on the head with the end of her syringe.

“Don’t make that face at me, young man. I’ll take that as a no.” She paused, moving behind him to check his back. It set off all kinds of alarms when her hand gently touched the tender skin of his recent injury, causing him to tense. Recovery Girl pulled away immediately, something he silently thanked her for.

“The Hatsumes will be here shortly,” the heroine informed him kindly. “I attempted to contact your parents through them but they told me that they don’t have any communications with them. Would you like to call anyone?”

“No,” Izuku replied. “My mom’s always busy with work, so I try not to bother her.” The lie rolled smoothly off his tongue, something he has said to anyone who cared enough to ask. The lie is bitter but so is he, and Izuku had long ago decided that this untruth was necessary.

Recovery Girl clicked her tongue, her brows furrowing. “You’re in the infirmary, boy, your mother deserves to be able to acknowledge that and haul ass to see you.”

He gave her a practiced smile, one he knew to appear genuine enough to ward off comments. “She’s out on business.” *She doesn’t deserve to know shit.*

Slowly, the woman nodded. “A parent should be around for their child,” she told him firmly, then turned to pin All Might with a stare. “You have five minutes before he’s officially allowed to leave.”

Once she left, Izuku surveyed the hero before him, unsure of what he hoped to accomplish by turning up here. His gaunt form still towered over Izuku, the distance between them permitting Izuku to examine him. He looked worse, he noted, concern addling any spite he could

muster. The skin of his face stretched across his angular bones, a sign of him not eating enough.

Without a stomach, Izuku imagined that such a task would be odd to fulfill.

“What do you want?” He inquired in a small, yet harsh, voice.

The hero shifted, somewhat startled by his words. Just as Izuku had been scrutinizing the hero, All Might returned the action, searching him for something as well. The electric blue of his eyes rose within his dark sclera to meet Izuku’s steady forest green.

Whatever he found in his gaze as they stared at one another, whatever the hero caught sight of gazing into the windows of his soul, it left him unsettled. Subtly, the man’s demeanor changed, his shoulders dropping for a millisecond before going back.

“I came to apologize for what I told you.” The energy around him shifted, the anxiousness of it melting into something encouraging. “I’m glad that you chose to pave your own way as a hero instead of listening to my words.”

Irritation spiked at the smile the man offered him. The kind words felt like a slight, no matter the sincerity Izuku saw. People could be sincere about all the wrong things and All Might was wrong to think his earnest apology would be fully accepted.

“I’m glad I didn’t listen to a lot of people in my life,” Izuku said, the sentence harsh on his tongue. Kacchan’s words haunted him now, as they did when sleep evaded him. Every insult and threat. His suggestion. “Have a good day, sir.”

The hero took the dismissal with barely hidden disappointment and a deep bow.

As the door closed softly behind the Number One hero, something nagged at him. Their interaction, as tension-filled and awkward as it had been, left him expectant. All Might had been psyching himself out, Izuku had seen it in his body language. Whatever he decided not to say to Izuku felt important.

Like a missed chance.

Toshinori, you idiot. You damn fool.

He was not sure if the insults were his own or if it was the echoes of Gran Torino berating him for his transgressions.

Midoriya Izuku had changed since their last meeting. He was stronger, bolder. *Bitter.* The hero-worship, the stars in his eyes when he looked upon All Might, they were gone. He could not begrudge the boy, not when it was his fault that the boy lost faith in him.

He worried for him, the scars on his body the result of something gruesome and extensive. His left arm bore gnarled, thick scars scaling from the back of his hand to just under the top of his shoulder. Long healed, yet flushed pink, a gruesome mark that would never fade.

Disturbingly, it reminded Toshinori of the permanent scar in his side.

Other, smaller, blemishes were dispersed across his exposed torso, though these were well-healed and faded with age. He wondered if the boy had all of them when they met, tucked away under his school uniform where no one would see them.

The boy's changes showed in his broadened shoulders, his gained muscles making him stocky. Toshinori thought that he could perhaps take One for All now, once he healed, but quickly pushed the thought aside. That was not enough. Midoriya certainly was, but Toshinori knew that when he needed his hero, he had failed miserably. Midoriya once gazed upon him like he hung the stars and moon, asking him a question he had asked others.

"I'm glad I didn't listen to a lot of people in my life,"

Instead of being among the apparent few to believe in him, Toshinori had been an addition to the list of those who dismissed him and his dreams.

Toshinori had not been enough and now, he would pay the price.

Chiyo smiled to herself as she listened to the rambunctious trio of Hatsumes dote and worry about Midoriya as they shoved a shirt on him. Her amusement dampened as she glanced back at his file.

The scar on his arm was several years old, perhaps six or seven, but

the file she held told no stories. None to explain the scar, none to even tell her about check-ups. An empty medical file did not sit well with Chiyo, not when that scar had to have been tended to professionally to heal as excellently to allow the boy the kind of mobility he displayed when using his arm.

The boy didn't mention them or pick at them. In fact, the only indication he gave of knowing they were even there was the light caress of his thumb over the disfigured skin on his left hand while he waited for the Hatsumes to arrive. Chiyo wondered, curiosity burning, but she remained silent.

She could wring the story from him at a later date, when he was officially her student to care for.

But in the meantime, she would stare at the baren file in disdain.

He should feel elated, Izuku supposed, as he sat alone on his bed. His dreams were being put in motion. All Might apologized to him, believed in him.

But the silence around him weighed on his shoulders, dragging his head down into his hands. Damp droplet-shaped circles grew on his pajama pants, prickles creeping up his body.

The army figure in his palm bit into his flesh, carrying his thoughts back to the days before the apartment became so suffocating. The days when he wandered through streets and busy roads, dizzy with hunger when the food ran out and his mother had not returned.

His searching led him to the place he now knew as Dagobah beach. Finding a whole beach of metal and trash caught his delirious interest enough for him to stumble down the stairs. He walked along the paths carved in the trash until it all parted for a glorious view of the water sparkling with the light of the sun.

His mom used to indulge them both with fantasies about what they would do on a beach together, where his dad wouldn't follow them. The two of them would swim and play in the sand, enjoying the cool waters and the warm sun. She would gush over the view and the shells, the possibility of finding something decorative and lustrous to bring home and remember the vacation.

Izuku looked back at the piles of rubble, several pieces glaring at him brightly. Inside a few of the piles, shined metallic treasures, things Izuku thought his mom might like. Maybe if he grabbed one for her she would come back. Her voice squealed happily in his head, her green eyes alight with glee as she scooped him up from the sand and told him she would never leave him alone again.

Before he knew it, Izuku was reaching his arm into the pile of trash, desperate, short fingers grasping for something inside the pile even as things sliced into his skin. Wrapping his hand around something, he let out a sob of pain and tugged on it, trying to dislodge the treasure so that he could bring it back to their apartment. When it stayed put, he yanked at it until something gave, not caring that his arm and hand were being cut to ribbons by his harsh movements.

The space where his arm was collapsed, a scream ripping from his throat as metal and alike pierced his skin and crushed his bones.

He cried out, tugging and *tugging* at his arm in an agonizing attempt to release it. *"Mom! Help me!"* He shouted desperately, agony shooting up his arm as he moved. *"I'm sorry! I won't ever use my quirk again, I promise. Mom!"*

But she was not the one who came.

A man made of purple mist appeared in the clearing, his suit far too immaculate for the part of town they were in. His glowing eyes observed Izuku impassively as he wailed for help.

"What is your quirk?" He inquired, ignoring the child's pleas and crying. "Why would you not use it?"

Mom says it's bad, Izuku tried to force out. His vision clouded with spots, the blood pooling at his feet staining the sand. *Mom says I'm evil but if I could just give her the shiny thing, maybe she would love me again-*

The man stepped forward, nodding to himself. "I do not have a habit of taking children off the street but he may have use for your quirk. Or you." He added after a slight pause.

Izuku could barely register what he spoke, much less begin to process them but, suddenly, he was falling, the pressure crushing his arm alleviated as he descended.

The impact of crashing into something solid wracked him with pain, his body spasming before he mercifully passed out.

“Kurogiri.”

“Master.”

“You’ve brought a half-dead child into the base. He’s going to bleed on the carpet.”

Resisting the urge to cringe, Kurogiri retained his indifferent stare and gestured to the child’s prone form. “I suspect you may have an interest in his quirk, sir. If you wish it, I will dispose of him at once.”

“His quirk, you say?” Master extended his reach, one of his many quirks sinking into the boy. He froze momentarily, then hummed in intrigue. “Call the Doctor. Tell him to keep the boy alive.”

The vagueness of the request, a request for the *Doctor,* did not bode well.

With the boy gone and the groceries put away, he shoved away the impulse to tug at his metal collar.

To the Doctor, many things meant *alive.*

Izuku peeked through the ajar door, cautious to keep his presence unknown.

“Hisashi, please,” Mom begged, holding her hands up, palms out, in defense. “I-I promise-”

“Promise what?” *He growled, smoke pouring from his mouth as his throat flared with light. Mom cringed at the wave of heat he sent off when he exhaled. “That brat of yours doesn’t have a quirk like either of ours, Inko. What am I supposed to think?”*

“P-Please.”

“I don’t know what bastard you thought was better than me,” Advancing, he trapped her against the wall. “But I can assure you that I’m not nearly as replaceable as you are. So tell me, who was it?”

Mom shook her head rapidly, tears dropping onto their floor. “N-No one!”

she sobbed.

He slammed his fist into the wall, drawing a frightened yelp from her. "Who is his father?" He roared, heat singing her skin. "I won't ask you again."

"He's yours!" She insisted. "H-Hisashi, I promise he's yours!"

"I had no part in making that demon." His throat glowed with pent up rage, an inferno waiting to be unleashed. "And I want no part of this family, either."

"W-Wait," she called through her coughs. Mom batted at the smoke with her hands, stepping to follow his retreating figure. "Don't leave!"

"Don't leave!" Izuku latched onto her pant leg, his tiny body curling around it as much as he could manage.

"I can't take you with me, you're old enough to take care of yourself aren't you?" She said through gritted teeth, thrashing her leg around. "Mom's stressed out and she needs to relax, okay? I need to have fun."

"I-I'm fun!" He cried. "I can help you relax, please don't leave me again,"

"You're a child, *Izuku." She stuck her hand out and pulled on him, using her quirk to pry him off of her. "A* problem. *He left because of you! You and your damned, evil quirk! Let go of me before you accidentally use it on me."*

Instantly, he released her, staring at her with fright in his wide, teary eyes. "I-I'm s-sorry," he babbled. "Please stay, w-we can-"

"I'm sick of All Might reruns." she snarled. The key jingled in her hands. "There's food in the fridge. And wear your gloves!"

The door slammed shut before he could chase after her.

Hey. Hey, wake up.

Darkness surrounded him fully, the only thing noticeable in the void of sensation being the incessant poking on his cheek.

Get up, I want to know if you're any good at video games.

Blinking awake, he groaned. The ceiling spun above him, pins and needles prodding at the nerves in his limbs as a knife slashed at his brain.

The finger kept poking him. "Get up. Get up. Get up. Get-"

"No," he whined, drawing out the vowel, turning his head away from the voice and its poking.

Someone giggled and poked him harder. "Up. Up! UP!" The jabbing ceased and the voice let out an exaggerated groan. "C'mon, I'm *bored.* Kurogiri hasn't done anything this interesting since I've known him, and Sensei let you stay, so you *have* to be special."

Fully realizing that someone was talking to him, talking about people he didn't know, Izuku's eyes snapped open, a gasp escaping his throat. "Where am I?" he wheezed in one short breath. "Who're you talking about?"

As if it was tired of being ignored, pain flared in his left arm. Right. The arm that was crushed under a mound of metal. Tears rose to his eyes as they darted down to the bright white cast encasing his entire arm. He couldn't see any part of his arm from the top of his shoulder to the ends of his hands. No mobility was granted by the thick, heavy cast and he wondered if his arm was even in there or not, or if he would even still be able to use it.

"Oi, calm down." Whipping his head back to the sound of the now-uncomfortable voice, he found himself staring at a young boy. His pale blue hair appeared grey as it drooped around his face. His red eyes shifted around the room as he squirmed in the chair. "You're at the base. And Kurogiri is the buzzkill that brought you here."

Brought me…

Purple mist. Yellow eyes. Tailored suit.

"You wear gloves, too." The boy continued, an edge of contained excitement bleeding into his rasping tone. "I'm Shigaraki Tomura."

"M-Midoriya Izuku."

The small room that encased them was simple. The bed was in the corner with a bedside table and an empty desk sat at the other end of

the room. The chair was absent but Izuku suspected that it was under the boy.

“Kurogiri says you don’t know what your quirk is.” He squinted down at him with mild distaste. “That’s pretty lame. Mine is called Decay and it’s really cool.”

He shrunk under the boy’s scrutinizing stare but perked up at the mention of his quirk. “What does it do?”

Shigaraki faltered, glancing at the door, but whatever crossed his face vanished to make room for the proud expression that he put onto his face. “I can disintegrate things.” Again, he looked away, this time at his gloved hands. “Want to see?”

A tug pulled at the edges of his awareness, drawing him to Shigaraki. It reminded him of the sensation he felt when his mom yelled at him.

Ignoring the feeling, Izuku nodded, wincing at how the action irritated the birds pecking at his brain. Shigaraki quickly took off one of his gloves and shuffled around the room for a minute, coming back with a small figurine in his hands. It was a hero Izuku couldn’t remember the name of.

“I don’t really like this one so I think it’s okay for me to get rid of it,” He mumbled to himself.

Izuku gasped in amazement, observing with rapt attention as the figurine turned to dust before his eyes under the five-fingered touch of Shigaraki. “That’s so cool!” He practically burst, struggling to sit up and fully witness the other boy’s quirk. The resulting throb echoed throughout his entire body, causing any strength he mustered to disappear.

Shigaraki scooted his chair closer to the bed, peering over Izuku as he panted. “Kurogiri said your arm is *really* messed up,”

“W-Want to sign m-my cast?” he asked shakily. Messy, uncollected vision of other kids’ signed casts swirled through his head.

“Why would I sign your cast?” Shigaraki asked, frowning in confusion.

“B-Because that’s what friends do.” Shigaraki froze and Izuku’s brain had the decency to make him aware of his assumption.

“Friends?” He tested, the twist of his lips lifting into a half-smile. “You

can only be my friend if you aren't some NPC."

"P-Player two?" Izuku suggested hopefully.

Before he could answer, the door opened and Kurogiri strode inside.

"Boys," he addressed with his distorted voice. "What were you discussing?"

"Midoriya wanted me to sign his cast," Shigaraki said smugly. "He's going to be my player two."

Completely side-stepping Shigaraki's other words, his glowing gaze shifted to the heavy cast encasing his arm. "Ah, the arm. How is it?"

"I-It's okay," Izuku said shakily. Stranger Danger rang through his mind like a blaring alarm now that his mind wasn't muddled by pain.

"The Doctor says that he ensured you would be able to use your arm, if you are concerned." Again, that feeling picked at his senses, this time drawing him to Kurogiri. This time it was different somehow. Icy instead of weighted like Shigaraki's.

Assurance that he would still have his arm when the cast came off flooded him with relief. "Do you want to sign my cast, too, Mr. Kurogiri?" He offered, trying to think of some way to properly thank him for helping him.

"Kurogiri is fine, Midoriya." He paused. "And I will find a marker."

As soon as Kurogiri left the room, Shigaraki shot Izuku a withering glare. "I thought that friends were supposed to sign casts," he grumbled.

"Kurogiri saved me, Shig-Shiga-" he huffed, not happy to stumble over syllables. "Kurogiri brought me here, Raki. I need to thank him!"

"Raki?" He repeated incredulously.

"F-Friends give each other nicknames," Izuku explained, attempting to cover his stutter.

He frowned but accepted the excuse, leaning back into the chair. "Should I give you one?"

Deku, snarled Kacchan's voice.

“S-Sure!”

“Midoriya,” he pronounced slowly. “Mido. Riya. Mi. Ri.”

“Friends can also call each other by their g-given names,” Izuku said nervously.

“Izuku,” he stated calmly, making him flush pink. He hadn't heard his name uttered with anything other than hate in weeks, not since his father left. “Izu. Ku. Zu. Zuku. Zuzu. Kuzu.” He mumbled with indecision. “What if I put them together? Midoku. Ridoku. Mizu. Rizu. Zumi.”

Was it possible to die from excessive blushing? At this point, Izuku felt confident that the answer was yes.

“Why are you so red? I don’t think I’ve ever seen someone this shade of color before. Should I call for Kurogiri?”

He made a sound of mortification from the back of his throat, raising his free arm to cover his face.

“You’re weird.” Shigaraki decided.

The two names that stood starkly against his pale cast and every time he looked at them a whole rush of endorphins flooded his systems. He wasn’t sure how mist even wrote with a marker but Kurogiri’s handwriting stretched neatly along a small expanse of space on the cast. Shigaraki followed a different train of thought, printing a giant scrawl of ‘RAKI’ in large, childish writing.

“You can’t play video games with one hand,” Shigaraki thought aloud. “But Sensei hasn’t come to get me yet, so I can show you what to do.”

Izuku cheered, shimmying in place to make room on the bed for his friend. Kurogiri had been really nice to Izuku, helping him sit up. He didn’t yell at him once! Shigaraki was kind, too, in his own way. He let Izuku cling to his arm, albeit with doses of reluctance that seemed to shrink each time he repeated the action.

The meals Kurogiri brought them were the best ones he had ever consumed, his starved stomach agreeing with him wholeheartedly.

“Sensei has finished examining your quirk,” Kurogiri said as he entered the room. Izuku flinched at the mention of his quirk, snuggling closer to Shigaraki for comfort. “He would like to test it once your arm is healed.”

His mother’s cutting voice made him shake his head fervently before he realized it. “N-No! It’s bad. Mom says it’s bad!” he insisted, hiding his face behind his right arm.

“It’s not,” Kurogiri stated plainly.

“But it made everyone go away,” he blubbered, full-on sobbing now. “I don’t want you to go away. I-”

“It’s just some stupid quirk,” Shigaraki interrupted. “If Sensei didn’t like it, you’d already be gone.”

“Indeed. We will not go away once we know more about your quirk.”

“P-Promise?”

“Promise.”

There was no way for Izuku to tell how long he had been in the base. Because of his arm, he hadn’t left the bed for much other than to relieve himself. Shigaraki left for a few hours during each day and Kurogiri tutored Izuku on his subjects while it was just the two of them. Izuku thought it odd that Kurogiri taught him how to properly hold certain knives or pay ‘bills’ but didn’t question his teacher. Teachers never liked him before but Kurogiri verbally expressed how much easier it was to handle Izuku compared to Shigaraki, much to the other’s disdain.

When he woke up one day, the cast was gone. Like the first time he woke up, sharp pains prodded beneath his skin and his eyes trailed the ceiling sluggishly. Even the jarring realization that the weight he had been working around simply vanished couldn’t pierce through the fog that descended upon his brain.

In place of the cast, slash after notch after jab of scar tissue sat obviously on his skin. He tried to move his fingers, nearly sobbing when they responded immediately, even if the movements were trembling.

Once his head cleared, he bounced around the room, waiting for his friends to come back so that he could show them his arm. It looked spindly and thin from disuse, but Izuku could *see* it, and that was more than enough for him.

“Kurogiri!” he squealed when the man opened the door. “Kurogiri, look! Look, my arm!”

He chuckled. “Yes, Midoriya, I see.”

“Do you know where my cast went?” Unbeknownst to the inquisitive child, the man stiffened, his aura darkening. “I didn’t see anyone take it off.”

“Do not concern yourself with such things,” Kurogiri said.

“But you and Raki signed it,” Izuku pouted, puffing up his cheeks.

He peered down at him curiously. “What does that matter?” he asked.

“It’s a symbol of our friendship,” Izuku continued, spiraling into tears. “C-Can I please keep it?”

Hesitantly, Kurogiri answered. “I’m afraid it has already been disposed of, Midoriya.” He glanced up at the room, bypassing the crying boy to pick up a small figurine.

“Midoriya, hold out your hand.” Holding out his right hand, Izuku sniffled. His teacher pressed the figurine into his hand. “This is yours now. Tomura and I want you to have this. Do you accept our gift?”

Nodding rapidly, Izuku’s breath hitched with renewed balling. “Y-Yes!” he stuttered, holding the small object close to his chest.

“Would you like to know what your quirk is?”

The sudden change in topic jarred Izuku but he nodded meekly.

“Tomura’s sensei has deduced that upon touching someone, you can put them into a battle with themself. He says that according to his analysis quirk, yours pits a person against their insecurities.”

Izuku tilted his head in incomprehension.

Kurogiri sighed deeply. “Your quirk makes people be rude to themselves.” He said simply. Before Izuku could start wailing again, he shushed him. “This is a very good quirk, Izuku. When you learn to

control it, you will be a very powerful asset to Tomura. You want to please him, don't you?"

"Y-Yeah,"

"And I believe that as you develop we will find new facets within your quirk as you grow. I doubt that any emitter quirk in the current times is as simple as the user thinks they are."

He allowed Izuku to ramble about the varied uses of an old hero's brief shock emission quirk, both of them grateful for a more pleasant change in topic.

Later in the day during his time with Shigaraki, he rolled around on the bed, relishing his newfound ability to move so easily.

"Raki, I thought you said this one was easy," Izuku groaned, sinking into Shigaraki's side. Shigaraki grunted in displeasure but didn't push him off.

"It *is* easy, Izuku," Shigaraki insisted. "You're just *terrible* at playing videogames."

Shigaraki's casual use of his given name still made him blush. He doubted that anything his friend called him other than Midoriya would have made him a stuttering mess, but at least he was beginning to become used to his name being spoken with fondness.

Izuku watched Shigaraki defeat a miniboss with ease and finesse that he did *not* understand but he smiled up at Shigaraki anyway. "I think you're just amazing at this, Raki, and I'm a beginner."

Shigaraki's cheeks lit up with pink and he shoved Izuku away, causing the latter to laugh and push himself up to look his friend in the eyes and say, "I think you're wonderful, Raki!" And as he did every time without fail, Shigaraki's face went beet red and he scowled at Izuku as he latched onto his side.

Izuku had a feeling neither of them got hugged much so he hugged Shigaraki a lot. Once he figured out what kind of reaction Shigaraki had when given an honest compliment, he *drowned* the kid in them.

The swift change in Izuku's everyday life left him reeling, but he wouldn't change it for the world.

It was nice to have a friend who didn't insult him or use their quirk to

hurt him.

It was nice to have warm meals and talk with people who didn't hate him.

Shigaraki and Kurogiri were weird but Izuku was too so he didn't care. Shigaraki was his friend and he treated Izuku with the kindness he figured a friend should. Kurogiri taught him interesting things and hadn't snapped at him once.

But nothing so brilliant as this new life could last.

The light in the room turned on without warning and Kurogiri's usually gentle touch harshly dragged him out of his bed.

"Midoriya, get dressed." He commanded. That thing pulled at his brain, directing him to Kurogiri, so Izuku barely hesitated to listen.

Kurogiri walked out the door, gesturing for Izuku to follow, and he balked.

"W-What?" he whispered. Even with his healed arm, he stayed in the room, doing small exercises with his arm and continuing their usual schedule. "We're going outside?"

He left the question unacknowledged, instead saying, "Tomura's waiting."

Izuku scrambled after him, latching onto Kurogiri's nearest hand. When he glanced down, Izuku huddled closer, frightened by the unfamiliar setting. His teacher allowed the contact, not making a comment.

His mood lifted slightly at the sight of Shigaraki but he refused to meet his eyes. Scanning the room, he found a man, lithe and pale, squirming in a chair. He thrashed fruitlessly against his bindings, a gag muffling his pleas, and a blindfold obstructing his vision. Izuku could still decipher his words, though.

The strange feeling got stronger, filling the room.

"Use your quirk on him," Kurogiri ordered, using a voice Izuku had never heard before.

Izuku whipped around, his scarred arm twinging at the sudden movement. Kurogiri's eyes narrowed and Izuku took a step back. "N-

No-”

“Do it.”

Kurogiri had never looked at him like that before.

He threw his gaze to Shigaraki, pleading for some assistance, but he avoided his eyes once more.

The man was kneeling, his exposed chest sallow and cold with sweat when Izuku raised a hand to his chest.

Nothing happened.

“Curious,” Kurogiri muttered, then doubled back to this new persona and shot him a scathing glare. “Use your quirk, *now.”*

Something in his chest lifted, an unknown weight dissolving as Izuku tried for them, and the man froze. Shoving down his horror, he stayed put. The pain in his head built steadily, impossible to ignore.

“K-Kurogiri, s-something’s wrong-”

He grabbed Izuku’s arm and pressed his hand back into the man’s chest. “Keep-”

He froze, falling victim to his quirk, and Izuku let out a sob of apology to both of them. “I-I’m s-sorry,” he breathed on repeat as everything became too much at once.

Izuku stumbled back, wrenching himself away from both of them, and fell to the ground. He stayed on the ground, curling into himself and breathing hard against the knives digging into his brain. Voices called to him and hands pulled him off the ground but Izuku didn’t want to hear any of it. Something was coming out of his nose. Something in his mouth tasted funny.

He gave in to the darkness beckoning to him, gladly accepting the escape.

If Tomura were asked, he would refute it and refuse to give any sort of a straight answer, but he felt… happy when Izuku was with him.

His kind touch sated whatever beast inside him hungered to destroy.

His warmth radiated from his body and Tomura basked in the affection he offered so easily. The boy didn't balk at his rude tone of voice or fear him and his quirk.

Izuku was an uncharted degree of *good,* and Tomura had only begun to navigate it.

Tomura noticed that Izuku didn't like having his skin covered, not as he did. Izuku liked short sleeves and bright colors, a contrast to Tomura's preferences. Their skin brushed occasionally but he never went still like Kurogiri. He never touched Izuku and caused him pain.

Kurogiri hadn't touched his hands and yet he was subjected to Izuku's quirk. Apparently, his quirk behaved differently from his own, not requiring five fingers to be activated.

Originally, Izuku's outright refusal to use his quirk made him resist the urge to roll his eyes but as he watched Izuku's expression twist with pain, the harder it became for him to stay put.

Kurogiri straightened beside Izuku's bedside, his experienced hands ensuring that his friend was safe. Alive. "He will not want Midoriya around anymore, you realize this?"

Tomura understood.

He knew that Sensei would have no use for a quirk that damaged its holder so dreadfully, even if the power garnered a certain amount of appeal.

That meant Izuku had no use.

He watched absently as Izuku fell through Kurogiri's portal, willing himself not to cry.

Don't cry.

But alone in his room, the silence consumed him with taunting echoes of his friend's laughter. He shivered without the heat of Izuku's body beside him and finally allowed the dam to break. Curled into himself, muffling his cries with his pillow, Tomura mourned everything he gained and lost in such a short amount of time. He cried at the loss of those hands messing with his hair and the compliments he would not hear for simply *being.* He longed for his friend to come back.

Please, come back.

But Sensei would not allow it. Kurogiri already sent him off at his orders and Sensei's orders were irrefutable.

During his next training session, Tomura disintegrated half the room, infuriated at himself. At Kurogiri. At Sensei.

The amount of rage he felt was unprecedented, and this time, Izuku was not present to calm him down.

Sand blew through the tips of his fingers, chasing after the wind only to fall back a little further from where it started.

Izuku thought it was like him.

He chased Tomura and fell, gaining something, but not being able to move any further.

Izuku sat alone on Dagobah beach, surrounded by trash, scars racing up his left arm to forever remind him of his time with them.

He didn't want to find his way back to an empty apartment. He didn't want to think about how no one would comment on his absence because *he had no one.*

Liars, his mind hissed in fury as he balled. *Liars. They said they would stay. They said they would* stay.

"Promise."

He screamed at the betrayal, his voice as wrecked and unstable as he felt. Izuku cried for his friend, his tears landing silently in the sand as the sun set. He cried for those small smiles and blushing faces and loud cheers when he won a game. He longed to catch one more glimpse of the warmth of those ruby-red eyes that were always so relaxed around him.

Izuku knew why he was thrown away, tossed out of their lives like he had never been there to begin with.

It was his quirk. His stupid, *evil* quirk.

The odd feeling disappeared.

Izuku blinked and found himself in his room.

He ran his hand over the scars and fought off the tears streaming down his face. He barely covered them up but he made it a point to never mention them. No one asked either. Mei and her moms knew he'd gotten it at Dagobah but nothing else. They did not know about his quirk either. He refused to put their relationship with him to chance.

In middle school, it hadn't been the trickiest thing to cover them up. The uniforms did the job well enough and no one ever saw him out of them besides the Hatsumes.

Izuku curled up on his bed and stared at the figurine on his nightstand. It was one of a soldier, not a hero, and tiny enough to have fit in Izuku's pocket. It was the only thing he had from that weird hideout. The only physical thing aside from his scars to remind Izuku of how exactly he knew about his quirk's abilities.

Questions about Tomura and Kurogiri rolled around in his head but he knew they would be left unanswered.

The thing inside his chest, the damned quirk, writhed in remembrance of its own use begging to be let out.

Izuku imagined himself adding another weight onto the locked box he crammed it in.

Chapter End Notes

If it wasn't apparent, the 'odd' feeling was his quirk

First Days Are The Worst

Chapter Notes

edit: 12/19/2020

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Izuku imagined receiving his letter from UA after taking their exams, he pictured himself in the apartment, alone and anxious for either a confirmation or the damnation of his aspirations.

But this was so much different than he could have imagined.

Mitsu put her hands together, her golden eyes positively glowing with pride, as she stared at the unsealed envelopes. Ayumi vibrated in her seat as she smiled, showing off her sharper-than-normal teeth.

“I’m so-” A smile broke out across her face, tears making her eyes shine. “God, how the hell did we end up with two amazing children?”

“What she means,” Ayumi signed, pausing to wipe away her own tears. *“Is that we could not be more proud of you two.”*

“We’re going to brag about this for the rest of our f-fucking lives.” Mitsu sobbed. “Our co-workers are going to tell us to shut the hell up and I’m going to shove pictures of you in their fucking faces.” She leaned against Ayumi’s shoulder, sniffling and rubbing at her eyes.

Not that Izuku could really judge. He had, after all, been crying since the hologram of All Might told him he managed to not only pass, but earn the top spot. Mei latched onto him after they all met in the living room, the two of them bursting at the seams with exhilaration, and hadn’t released him since their initial collision.

“Did either of you call our grandparents?” Izuku realized, a moment later, that he was being included in the *our*. Mitsu called him their kid. He supposed that this was hardly the first time but it stunned him how easily they included him in their family.

“No,” Mistu gasped, jolting upright and throwing herself off the couch. “Shit- Fuck-” she cursed as she narrowly avoided crashing into a wall.

“Dad, get Ma, Ayumi and I are raising the pride of this family.” He blushed at the words, sinking further into Mei’s embrace. A voice

garbled by distance and technology reached their ears, saying something that made Mitsu laugh as she re-entered the living room with her phone. “Dad, I’m talking about our kids, not the robot that Mei exploded in your garage.”

The man on the other line laughed, then paused. *“Wait… ‘kids’?”* he asked.

The ensuing video call left him in a goopy puddle of mush, all the endearing introductions and acceptance jarring him. Apparently, he had *grandparents* now, which was fucking wild considering he had no parents nine months ago.

Mei giggled, squeezing him with the arms she wrapped around his shoulders.

“Shut up, MeiMei,” he muttered, only succeeding in causing her giggles to intensify.

Why couldn’t he have a cloaking quirk instead of some dumbass empath quirk? The door’s enormity was its own brand of intimidation because apparently everything in this school needed to be ginormous. He wondered if there had been a past student with a mutation quirk that made them rebuild the entrances to accommodate them, or if it truly was an intimidation tactic. If his tuition was going to giant robots and large doors, then he had some choice words for whoever makes those decisions.

He pushed the door open and thought about simply shutting it again when the sound of Bakugo’s aggravated voice reached his ears. And, he wanted to say thanks to whatever deity was getting a kick out of his suffering, the loud kid who called him out at the exams. Instead of doing the desired action and calmly retracting himself from the situation, Izuku sighed in defeat and slinked into the room. No one glanced at him, too involved in their own conversations to notice Izuku silently passed the threshold.

Until someone practically popped into existence in front of him, the smile on her face bright, and pointed her hand at his chest. “It’s you, from the practical exams!” she said excitedly, breaking the cover of chatter Izuku had planned to use as his shield. People’s conversations paused at her shout, their eyes flicking over to them. “I wanted to say thanks, you really saved me out there.”

“Oh, hey!” another student shouted, coming over to them. It was the tailed boy he helped out from under some fallen robots. “You saved me, too, thanks!”

A large figure stopped behind the blonde with a tail. “I carried you out, you alright now?”

Izuku opened his mouth to stutter some response out to make them back off but a hand chopped in front of his face. Standing taller than Izuku by a margin was the boy with the glasses, his back stiff and straight as he held out his hand.

“Your performance during the practical exam was very becoming of a hero!” *Maybe if I just pretend I don’t know what these people are talking about they’ll leave me alone.* “You didn’t hesitate to help, even when the challenge of taking down a Zero-pointer was in front of you.”

Oh, god damnit.

Izuku held in a sigh of mortification as the room erupted with disbelief.

“You took down a Zero-pointer?” A pink girl with horns cried in alarm.

“That’s so manly, dude!” A red-haired boy exclaimed, stepping closer.

“How’d you do it? Those things were huge!”

The room’s enthusiastic interrogation halted, suspense filling the air as his classmates turned to him for a response.

Izuku blinked, the expectant silence of all classmates a far throw from the clamor they created. “Support items.” He deadpanned, giving them a thumbs up and feeling *so fucking awkward* . “They’re great.”

“If you’re all here to talk, you should leave.”

Izuku jumped, bumping into the red-haired boy with sharp teeth when he took a step away from the door and saw a raggedy man on his side in a yellow sleeping bag.

“Welcome to UA’s hero course.” He stood and unzipped the sleeping bag, eyeing the students with a blank, tired expression. “It took eight seconds for you all to shut up. That’s not going to work, rational students know how precious time is.”

With the sight of him standing at his full height, his capture weapon and hair on display, Izuku wondered if this was some sort of dream. “Eraserhead?” he muttered so softly in marvelment he didn’t think anyone would have heard him. But (oh god. Oh *fuck)* Eraserhead glanced down at *him,* his expression shifting ever so slightly from the bored mask he wore. Izuku could honestly feel his death. Yup, this was how it happened. Death by eye contact.

“Hello, I’m Aizawa Shouta, your teacher.”

His eyes strayed from Izuku, slowly taking in the mass of students that accumulated behind him. “Ignoring whatever reason you’re all crowding the door,” He pulled out UA uniforms from his sleeping bag. “put these on and go outside.”

On the way to the locker room, blood-red eyes burned holes into the back of his head. The other students were mingling and talking about Eraserhead’s behavior. Some of them complained about missing the orientation ceremony that every other class got to sit in on.

He kept the relief he felt to himself when he realized that there would be an orientation ceremony and that they would likely not attend it. Large crowds were never his forte.

Bakugo pushed past him, his shoulder roughly slamming into his as they entered the locker room. Resentment pooled in his core as he remembered their last conversation. If that *interaction* could be called a conversation.

“What the hell, shitty Deku?” He seethed, gripping the collar of Izuku’s uniform. “I told your useless ass not to apply!”

Izuku only glared up at him, meeting that once friendly ruby gaze, without flinching. “I don’t care what you tell me to do,” he said steadily, holding his burning stare even when Kacchan’s other hand popped in warning.

“I’m going to UA, Kacchan, and if any student or teacher is worth their salt I’m not certain they’ll tolerate you beating up another student.” His ears rang at the too-close blast, half his vision on one side blacked out from the flash of light. The skin of the side of his face hurt.

Kacchan growled. “You worthless-”

Izuku grabbed the arm pinning him to the wall. "I am not worthless!" *he snarled. Kacchan's grip loosened, shock widening his narrowed eyes. "Stop fucking saying that! I worked hard and fought for my spot at UA, so don't you* dare *say I can't go!"*

He opened his mouth, lip curled and poised to beat him into the ground like he had done for years.

But this time, Izuku slid his hand onto the bare flesh of Kacchan's hand, watching as he froze until his touch. His skin crawled with unease, the sensation of utter weightlessness he felt almost enough to distract him from the buzzing pain mounding in his skull. Slipping from his lax hold, Izuku made to bolt, but Kacchan recovered faster than the rest of them ever had. The contact must have been too short compared to the others to put him in a daze.

He bit down on his own relief because that meant Kacchan had not been hurt like the rest of them.

"The fuck was that, Deku?" He raged, flying at Izuku as he reached the mouth of the alcove. "You think you can use your quirk on me?"

Izuku stopped, swiveling around to face him. His eyes burned with fury, the faded scars on his body tingling. His cheek throbbed with the recent burn. "If you think you have any room to talk like that, then you're more of a dumbass than I pegged you for."

Catching the right hook, he slammed Kacchan into a brick wall. His hands popped with bursts of his quirk but Izuku thrust his knee into his gut, not daring to allow him any time to recover. Kacchan heaved on the ground, giving him the chance to turn tail and dash away.

His headache didn't last long.

Halfway through changing, a pair of eyes settled on him, making him shove down the urge to let his eyes drift to the source of the pressure on his neck. The room's noise lessened enough for his eyes to finally snap up. Staring, he had dealt with. Humiliation, a common occurrence.

But that had been middle school.

This was high school, and he'd be damned if he allowed himself to be

gawked at like some zoo creature for them.

With that deliberation, he met the sharp-toothed boy's red eyes, ones so unique from the already contrasting gazes, Izuku almost startled visibly. Concern furrowed his classmate's brows, his mouth pulling into a slight frown.

His eyes lifted from Izuku's scarred arm when he finished dressing, finally meeting his own. "Dude... those are some gnarly scars you have on your arm."

He refused to flinch at the comment. He refused to be reduced to his scars in front of his classmates. He wondered if Bakugo was one of the several gazes glued to his left arm and longed for Mei's hand clasped strongly around his own, for Mitsu's arm weighing reassuringly on his shoulders, for Ayumi's shadow cast over him as she stood taller than all of them and warded off the stares.

When Izuku first told them that he acquired his scars from an unstable pile in Dagobah beach, they all reacted in their own ways. Mei immediately drop kicked the piece of scrap metal she had been inspecting, dusting her hands off, and sat down next to Izuku without saying a word. Ayumi's ear fins flared in surprise and she broke the metal water bottle she had been holding, the metal molding to accommodate to the shape of her curled palm. Mitsu's face drained of color, anything expressive in her features dropping.

The fact that they were physically present at Dagobah beach didn't help in the slightest.

The confession made them back off on their questions concerning his past for a few days. He was expressly forbidden from going anywhere near Dagobah beach during that time and though they couldn't enforce the decree, he obeyed and waited for a chance to explain that he was fine now and knew how to be cautious.

Staring into the red-haired boy's eyes he wondered why people think his scars were their business? It wasn't a shared wound. Hero students, no, *people* should know how rude it is to call attention to and recklessly point out something that someone can't fix like they need to do something about it. Izuku knew that his scars were gnarled and ugly but that didn't mean *other* people could say that.

"Yup," Izuku said snappishly, breezing past them all.

He was not ashamed of his scars.

Scars told stories, tales that strangers had no right to ask him about.

No one could force him to hide his memories away and, for better or worse, Izuku wanted to remember his time with Tomura and Kurogiri.

“That was fast,”

The gruff voice forced him from his thoughts. Izuku blinked and felt the sun warming his side. He was outside now. With his teacher. The teacher, who happened to be the pro hero Eraserhead.

“Most students take their time, make a friend or two.”

His eyes were drawn to his arm but they flicked back to his face in an instant, paying the marks covering his skin no mind. “I saw your practical exam,” he said, his face not shifting from the bored mask he wore. “You cost us a giant robot.”

Relieved that his respect for his hero could remain intact, Izuku adopted an amused expression. “It was going to run someone over,” he reasoned, daring to meet his teacher’s eyes. “I think my actions were justified.”

“Do you really think we would have allowed that to happen?”

Eraserhead regarded him carefully when Izuku hesitated to respond. Coming to a conclusion, Izuku shook his head. “No,” he answered. “But accidents happen. Sometimes people aren’t paying close enough attention and I didn’t want to take that kind of chance when she could have been maimed in an *exam,* of all things.”

After a lapse in their conversation, Eraserhead spoke again. “You recognized me earlier,” he prompted.

His aloof demeanor quailed and melted away, heat rushing to his face as he scoured his mind for a proper answer. *Yeah, you’re my favorite hero so I basically scanned and analyzed every single bit of information about you I could get a hold on.* Nope. No. Definitely not.

“Y-You’re a great hero, Eraserhead.” Questions whizzed through his mind, his hands twitching for a pencil. “I have so many questions.”

The sound of voices approaching called an abrupt and unfortunate end to their conversation.

Class began with a bang, the threat of expulsion now hanging over all

their heads, and Izuku ran his thumb over the top of his left hand, running his thumb over the grooves in his skin.

Okay, he could do this.

Izuku was called for the grip test and picked up the clamp that Yaoyorozu had disregarded. He ignored Iida's comments and hand chopping, watching the digital number rise as the clamp squeezed.

"Midoriya, we are supposed to be making use of our own skills!" Iida scolded in an affronted manner.

"I am," he responded dryly. "Sensei hasn't said anything, has he?"

His classmates turned to their teacher, who shrugged. "He's making use of his surroundings."

Iida stiffened and apologized, the tests moving on.

Yaoyorozu ended up at the top for many reasons and Izuku couldn't wait to analyze her quirk. If she could make a motorized scooter in a minute, one that functioned as it should no less, he wondered what limitations and requirements she was bound by.

His scores seemed utterly average compared to some of his classmates but he stood in the middle of the pack, something he acknowledged with pride. Not having a physical quirk sucked but it wasn't as if he was doing terribly. The invisible girl and the short, purple-haired boy were not nearly as physically fit as him and neither of their quirks were suited to help them aside from Mineta, who stuck himself onto someone when the chance arose.

Seeing the multitude of new quirks in his class exhilarated him. If they felt comfortable talking with him about them, he would have to ask them about their quirks when the opportunity came.

To everyone's immense relief, no one was kicked out on their first day.

"Why didn't you use your quirk to help yourself out?" Uraraka poked him suddenly in the shoulder. His classmates glanced at them, likely wondering the same thing.

"Why isn't Hagakure using her quirk?" Izuku shot back. The girl in question squeaked at the stares that were directed at her. Uraraka blinked in confusion. "Not every quirk is physical."

Eraserhead's stare burned into his back, reminding him what his file said about him, reminding him of the lie that he kept alive, but he let Izuku walk back into the locker room without a word.

Izuku left before any of his classmates could even start switching their clothes.

Alone with Eraserhead again in the classroom, he grabbed his notebook and decided that his questions for his teacher could wait while his memories of his classmates' quirks were still fresh in his mind. His leg bobbed at an increasing speed, the sound of his rapid mumbling tumbling out of his mouth lost to him as he neatly and efficiently dove into his thoughts. When his hand started to cramp, he paused and switched the dull pencil into his right hand to continue writing.

Regrettably enough, Izuku knew there wouldn't be time to make an appropriate page for each of them because of the time restraints and his lack of knowledge. Some of them weren't able to demonstrate the extents of their quirks and he was sure that each of them had more than the naked eye could see.

Hagakure came to mind again as he jotted down questions concerning her refractability. As he commented, her quirk would have done nothing to help her during the practical exam. She did not appear to have enough brute force to break a robot, so perhaps her points were more dedicated to Rescue points than to Villain points.

Or, a small, sneaky voice began, *she stole villain points, too.*

It would be in character with her quirk to be more sly than she let on. With her ability to go overlooked, it would make sense for her to learn to be more clever to make herself stand out.

Movement caught his attention and every instinct in him screamed *danger.* The world crashed around him and all he could think about were the stares burning into his back and the charred notebooks, his skin stinging with the phantom pain of his worst days. No, no, *no.* Not again. He could not remember where he was but he sat in a classroom and that was enough of a warning sign for him. He tried to remember the Hatsumes but they were consumed by jeering classmates and mountains of familiar terror. What should he do? What should he do?

He stopped writing, the haphazard half-thoughts halting in his panic, when another hand pressed itself over his bare skin.

The cage inside him burst, the lock loosened by his lapse of concentration.

He scrambled to reverse his mistake but pain descended on him like a flock of hungry vultures picking at his body and clarity struck him, leaving nothing but the expressionless face of his teacher, who stood stock-still beside him.

Shouta wasn't exactly sure what he expected Midoriya to act like, but he was simultaneously aligning with his assumptions and completely disregarding them at the same time. The kid was intelligent, resourceful, and possessed the foresight to build muscle mass. He moved with the dexterity of a fighter and bore the scars on his arm without shielding them. Shouta granted the kid a pass when he dodged Uraraka's question, his deflection enough of an answer for every other student. The boy intrigued him, to say the least.

When Midoriya entered the classroom again, his quick-paced gait accompanied by jittering hands, he expected him to bombard him with the questions that he had unabashedly yearned to ask when they were outside. Midoriya ignored him completely, though. Not even sparing his teacher a glance, he plopped himself into his chair and pulled out a notebook. He watched his students steadily delve deeper into his own world as his foot tapped quietly against the desk leg, incoherent mumbles reaching his keen ears as he wrote and sketched.

The nature of what could possibly absorb so much of Midoriya's concentration evaded his knowledge until he heard snippets of his student's jumbled thoughts.

Hadn't he mentioned a hobby during his support gear evaluation?

Analyzers in the field of quirks were severely understaffed and undermotivated. Too few could grasp quirk science because the field of study was so abused by people in the industry. Quirk analysts, especially those in Support, needed to think further than what their quota would be fulfilled by but most did not.

Students trickled into the room slowly. The one name Kirishima stepped closer to Midoriya, something heavy in his gaze and Shouta held up a hand and shook his head. He wanted to see how long this kid could continue for. More students came in, taking their seats and speaking, but Midoriya paid them no attention. He paused his writing

for a moment and Shouta wondered if that was it, but then his pencil was in his right hand and he began anew.

Ambidextrous, huh? He grimly wondered if the skill had been acquired when the scars marking his skin were bandaged wounds. Shouta had been careful not to stare unlike some of his students, but he allowed himself the chance to scrutinize his memory of the times during the apprehension test that he did look at his arm. The scarring was old and unirritated. Midoriya's motor skills were obviously intact. The surgical way some of the less prominent lines presented contrasted the more jagged ones but he chalked that up to whatever medical treatment he managed to find.

Bakugo, the aggravatible boy with the explosion quirk, glared at Midoriya with a burning fury of a multitude of suns the entire time they were in the same room. He stood on the edges of the group of spectators that watched Midoriya work.

The bell rang and his students filed out.

Midoriya didn't seem to take notice.

Sighing, Shouta made his way over to Midoriya's desk. He didn't make it far before every bit of movement the boy had been making- the bobbing of his leg, the muttering, the darting of his eyes- all of just… stopped. Except for the writing. His hand valiantly kept moving, even if the rest of him froze. Shouta dipped forward, trying to catch his eye but the boy's eyes were worryingly distant.

He put his hand over the still moving one of his student, prepared to say something when-

Everything disappeared, a sudden darkness swallowing him whole.

Shouta wondered briefly if the coffee Nedzu forced him to drink during the faculty meeting that morning had really been terrible enough to cause him hallucinations. He wouldn't put it past the rat but-

Quirk, his brain supplied, remembering Midoriya. *He has a quirk.*

Rage simmered at the realization that this boy had lied on multiple legal documents. Why would he lie so thoroughly to avoid people knowing about his quirk?

"-should've expelled him." A voice hissed in his ear. His own voice.

“You should have seen it. You were just distracted-”

“Midoriya?” he called over the rising noise around him. No answer.

In the midst of the pitch-black expanse, something began forming, a figure. It startled him to see it turn and watch his own face make some twisted combination of a grin and a snarl, words spilling from its mouth-

Ripped from the world of nothing and thrust back into his classroom, Shouta fell onto his ass, disoriented. The lights of his classroom assaulted his vision, the world spinning.

“Midoriya,” he said hoarsely.

Instead of an answer, Shouta heard hacking coughs, and he hauled himself upright. Facing the wall, Midoriya braced himself against the wall and coughed blood into his hand in an attempt to stop the liquid from spewing everywhere. His legs buckled and Shouta caught his quaking body.

“M-My qu-quir-” He didn’t manage anything else before delving into another fit of wet coughs.

Standing, Shouta burst out of his classroom and sprinted down the halls, distantly aware of the fact that he bypassed several lingering students, but he could care less when his student was coughing up as much blood as he was. Midoriya stops coughing, his body going dangerously limp and Shouta bolts down the halls with renewed speed. Shouts follow him in the voice of one of his co-workers but he ignores them, not stopping until he reached the infirmary. He barged inside and put his student down on an empty bed.

Shuzenji is by his bedside in a moment. “What happened?”

Fuck- What happened? Shouta wasn’t sure if he could accurately answer that.

“I don’t know.” She cut him a sharp glare. “He used his quirk. I, I don’t *know,”* he stressed.

“Quirk?” she questioned. “I thought he didn’t have one.”

It had been a big deal for the UA staff when it was announced that a quirkless kid made it into the hero course. He would have been the first.

“I guess we know why he never used it,” Shouta muttered darkly.

Shuzenji cursed loudly. “Aizawa, chest compressions, *now.”*

His blood turned to ice but he obeyed the order. This was not how the year should be starting, this should not happen at any point in the year. Too much time passed, seconds and hours all at once, as he pressed down on Midoriya’s chest. He pushed harder, hoping that he wasn’t hurting his ribs too much but damnit, he would rather have the boy whine about pain than not be able to feel anything at all.

Please, Shouta begged the boy on the bed. *Please, just breathe-*

Mercy must have been given because Midoriya’s body lurched up, a wet cough sending blood spewing from his mouth. Shouta didn’t dare step away. No one could drag him from that spot because what if his student stopped breathing again? What if he died again?

He wheezed for air, choking on the blood that stained Shuzenji’s pristine sheets. Shouta’s hands, nauseatingly sticky from blood, were there before he could think, rolling Midoriya onto his side. Shuzenji kissed him and he melted into the bed, every bit of his energy spent. Breathing ragged and stuttering, Midoriya gulped in every ounce of air he could manage around the liquid in his throat.

He stared at nothing, then his eyes focused and flooded with tears. His hands, both of them red with his blood rose to shield his face as he sobbed quietly.

The realization dawning on Shouta was not a pleasant one.

This has happened to him before.

The notion was terrible, horrifying, but Midoriya knew what that experience had been.

Shouta could not concern himself with anger if he tried. No wonder his parents felt they had to lie about their son’s quirk. If he used it for- he glanced at the clock *(ten minutes haven’t even gone by)*- that short amount of time and he ended up *dying-*

He shut down that particular train of thought before he lost himself in the panic.

Midoriya flinched when Shuzenji moved away from his side. Shouta did not know how she could do that, did not know how her face could

be so calm when his student's blood dotted the pastel colors of her doctor's coat.

Midoriya curled further into himself when Shuzenji spoke, her voice soft and steady. "I'm not entirely sure what caused that, but he will fall asleep soon. I'll call his-" She stopped and hummed in annoyance. "I'll call the Hatsumes, I suppose."

"The Hatsumes?" He asked, his tone dangerously close to snappish. "What about his parents?"

She sighed, glancing at Midoriya's unconscious form. "His mother is the only relative he has but the last time I spoke with him about her, he insisted that she was too busy to bother." Shouta's disdain must have been plain on his face because Shuzenji made a noise of agreement. "I know, but he wouldn't budge. The Hatsumes are good women, though. He trusted them. His medical file is worryingly empty, too."

"What?" Finally, his feet unglued themselves from his previous spot, allowing him to whip around to face her. "But his arm-"

"I know," she interjected grimly. "That kind of injury combined with his lack of disability would require extensive procedures and physical therapy."

Shuzenji called the Hatsumes, the implications of their resident mystery student left to settle.

"Hello, this is Recovery Girl from UA highschool. I'm calling about Midoriya Izuku." She glanced at Midoriya's file once more before tossing it aside with a roll of her eyes. "At the moment, he is stable, but is there anything you could tell us regarding his quirk?"

The line went silent before a garbled voice said something.

"No, you heard me correctly. I would like any information possible on his quirk." She paused, listening to the woman talk with a pinched expression. "I see. If you could make time to come to UA- alright, thank you. I will tell the principal to expect you."

Shuzenji clicked her tongue in annoyance. "No file, no way to contact his mother, no information on his quirk. And that woman didn't even allow me to explain his condition."

With the time given to them, they situated Midoriya properly, hooking

him up to a monitor. After pulling it to Midoriya's bedside, he sank into one of the plastic chairs provided.

The door banged open and Hizashi burst inside, huffing and disheveled.

"Shouta," he gasped, his shoulders sagging in relief.

"Hizashi," he greeted monotonically, all his energy drained away with his adrenaline.

"There was blood," he explained, jerking his thumb to the general area outside of the infirmary. "There's a lot of blood in your classroom, Shou."

His eyes gradually drifted to Midoriya and widened behind his tinted glasses. He rushed to the other side of Midoriya's bed. "What happened?" he asked, scanning his prone body for injuries.

Shouta explained the situation, Shuzenji intervening where he wavered, and Hizashi returned his stare to Midoriya with shock coloring his features. "His quirk killed him?" he whispered, rightly horrified.

"That is the unfortunate conclusion," Shuzenji replied solemnly.

"And his emergency contacts, who are *not* his parents, are on the way?"

"Yes." Shouta rubbed his head to stave off the oncoming migraine. "Something is wrong here but we need more information, something this boy seems to be particularly skilled in hiding."

Hizashi set his jaw, eyes sharpening.

"I'll inform Nedzu."

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the support!

The Hatsumes Are Only A Fan of One (1) Midoriya

Chapter Summary

"I'm going to sock her in her child-negligent face," -Hatsume Mitsu

Chapter Notes

edit: 12/19/2020

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Mei scanned the cafeteria, her golden eyes snagging on the bunch of hero students spilling into the lunchroom She zipped over excitedly, wondering if Izuku was inadvertently hiding behind one of his classmate's broad-shouldered backs. They appeared perturbed by her sudden emergence at their sides but she focused on examining the crowd.

A frown pulled at the corners of her lips when she realized he was missing from his class.

"You." She grabbed the shoulder of a blonde boy with a black streak in his hair. "Where's Midoriya Izuku?"

"We aren't sure," answered a tall girl with a large ponytail. "We haven't seen Midoriya since our homeroom."

Scenarios flitted uselessly through her mind and she shoved them all aside. "Not one of you has seen him?" They shook their heads and her worry skyrocketed into the stratosphere. The last time he went missing at UA, he ended up in the infirmary with injuries and new scars, so where was he now?

Her cell phone rang, jolting her out of her thoughts. Stepping away, she answered the ringing. "Hatsume Mei, future CEO of Hatsume Industries," she recited with a distinct lack of her usual enthusiasm.

"Hello, this is Recovery Girl from UA highschool. You are the daughter of Hatsume Ayumi and Mitsu, yes?"

"Yes." Mei was no longer in the cafeteria. Instead, she was sprinting

blindly down the hallways, attempting to recall the maps and directions they had received at orientation.

“I am calling about Midoriya Izuku. He has you on his emergency contact list-”

“The infirmary is in the Hero course building, right?” she half-shouted into the phone. “Because I can’t remember the map and I’m just running around the school and-”

“You’re a student,” she mumbled, the noise barely carrying through the phone. “Yes, now-”

“Oh shit, there’s a blood trail.” Mei halts at the doorway of classroom 1-A for a brief moment, eyeing the vermillion color scattered in droplets, leaving a path of sorts for her to follow. “I’ll be there in a minute.”

Hanging up the phone, Mei bolted down the hallway and narrowly avoided slamming herself into a wall. She passed an equally harried Present Mic on the way, their eyes meeting for half of a second before they continued in opposite directions.

Heaving in the air, Mei knocked on the door to the infirmary. An exhausted-looking man answered the door, staring at her blankly. His eyes traveled behind her, his eyes narrowing with annoyance. Glancing back, she realized that the entirety of class 1-A was arriving behind her.

“I’m Hatsume Mei.” She introduced herself quickly. “Where is he?”

Instead of answering, he widened the gap in the door enough for her to enter. She darted inside, hands trembling as she laid eyes on her best friend. Nothing looked wrong, per se, except for the paleness of his skin. Paleness could mean all sorts of medical mumbo jumbo though.

“Don’t wake him.” She whirled around to see an exasperated Recovery Girl staring at her. “He needs proper rest.”

“I’m sorry about hanging up on you,” she said, her voice wavering. “Please, what happened?”

“I’ll let Aizawa explain that to you,” she sighed, gesturing at the man standing in the doorway.

Shouta did not possess the patience it would take to deal with them right now.

“Why are all of you here?” he asked, knowing the answer.

“Sir!” Iida shouted. “We are concerned for Midoriya’s well-being and health. Shoji informed us that Hatsume was contacted because he was in Recovery Girl’s care.”

“Don’t forget the blood trail,” Ashido commented, her eyes darting around in an attempt to peek into the room behind him. “There was a blood trail.”

“Aizawa.”

“Yes, Bakugo?” he sighed.

“It’s the nerd’s quirk, isn’t it?”

Shouta barely kept the disinterested expression on his face. Bakugo knew? Why? Since when?

“Go inside, Bakugo.” Outraged cries burst from his concerned students but he ignored that, preoccupied with the newest addition to the mysteries of the day.

“Leave,” he commanded. “Midoriya needs rest and you are all too loud.” Before they could refute him, he shut the door in their faces.

The room remained quiet, despite the additional people in the room, and Shouta lamented the fact that he needed to break the peace in the room.

“We have questions for both of you.” They both turned, eyeing each other up.

“How do *you* know Zuzu?” Hatsume inquired suspiciously. “He’s never mentioned you before.”

“I’ve known him longer than you, shitrag,” Bakugo fired back. “And he’s never mentioned *you,* either.”

“Stop antagonizing each other,” Shouta ordered, flaring his quirk in warning. “I will kick both of you out if I need to. Our questions can

wait."

The pair thankfully shut their mouths and waited, glaring at each other. He did not want to even begin unpacking the meaning behind that short-lived interaction, so he leaned against the wall, hands clean of blood but still pink from the scrubbing, and stared them down.

"Do both of you know about his quirk?"

Hatsume's head snapped up. "He doesn't have a-"

"I knew." Bakugo cut her off. "It's a fucking mystery to me how it's so fucked up-"

Shuzenji slapped his arm. "Don't curse like that in my workspace."

Hatsume looked between all of them in confusion. "What are you talking about?" she implored.

"Deku has a shitty quirk, Dreadlocks." Bakugo snapped. Shuzenji whacked his arm again and he tsked.

"Moving on," Shouta drawled. "Bakugo, do you have any details?"

"If you're that curious, why don't you check his fuc- fine!- through that journal he's so obsessed with?"

Quirk analysis, Shouta realized. Bakugo might be onto something. "Go to the classroom, grab his bag, make sure his notebook is in it, and bring it back here."

He stiffened. "Don't tell me what to-"

"Do as I say or you'll be expelled." Shouta pinned his student with a stare, forcing him to relent. The door slammed shut behind him.

Eijiro stared at the blood on the wall, on the floor, and on the desk, bewildered along with the rest of the class. They had returned in hopes of figuring something out because what the hell kind of quirk injured the user? But the moment they were inside the classroom, they stopped short at the scene before them.

"Dude... those are some gnarly scars you have on your arm."

Was he even going to get the chance to apologize for that?

Bakugo appeared out of nowhere, shoving past all of them, and barely paused at the scene worthy of a horror movie to pick up the lone backpack left in the room. He rummaged through it while the class tried to pry answers out of him. Apparently, he found whatever he was searching for because his palms crackled with explosions and he was gone, leaving them alone without any answers. Again.

Bakugo returned not long after his departure and shoved the backpack into his arms. “His shitty notebook is in there,” he growled, taking a seat on the far end of the room.

And by god, the contents of the notebook were terrifying. His coworkers all had pages chock-full of analyses on them and ways to completely destroy them in combat and negate or avoid their quirks. The suggested paths for improvement were interesting and the questions he posed were looking into some things Shouta hadn’t even thought of.

“I don’t think what you’re looking for is in there.”

He looked up to see Hatsume’s eyes locked on the notebook. “Zuzu has way too many of those things lying around, if he was doing an analysis on himself, it would be in an older journal, maybe even have one of its own.”

“Do you know where he keeps them?”

“Yeah, they’re all scattered in a few different locations, but I’ll get them for you.”

Shouta nodded. “I’ll arrange for one of the teachers to escort you wherever you need to be.”

“Do my moms know?” she asked suddenly.

“They were the first ones I called,” Shuzenji assured her.

His attention strayed from the notebook, looking between the two students in the room. “Do either of you know anything about Midoriya’s mother or how to contact her?” If anyone were to possess information on his parents, mother, or father, it had to be one of

them.

Hatsume bristled instantly, her demeanor becoming closed off and furious. “You’d be better off not contacting that hag at all, I think,” she spat, eyes narrowed in resentment. “Or, maybe you should. Then I can see what kind of shit person it takes to leave her son alone for months on end-”

“Watch what you say about her, Dreadlocks,” Bakugo growled.

Hatsume ignored him in favor of focusing on Aizawa. “I’ve known Zuzu for nearly a year and I’ve never seen her. Not a glimpse or a photo. She never drops him off or picks him up. In the few times I’ve been in his apartment it looked like only he lived there.” She scowled at the floor, curling her hands into fists. “Honestly, he sort of lives at Dagobah beach and that place is homier to him than the apartment. Inko, whoever she is, isn’t part of Zuzu’s life and I don’t think she should be at this point.”

Bakugo seemed to be having his own revelation, his hands falling to his sides as he lost himself in his head, but Shouta’s number of questions to answer just raised itself.

“You think he lives alone in an apartment?”

Hatsume winced. “He stays at Dagobah and my house mostly, but yeah, that’s what I gather.”

“Bakugo, in your experience, what is Midoriya’s mother like?”

Startled from his thoughts, his head snapped up. “All I remember is her being really freaking nice,” he said lowly, more to himself than to Shouta. “My mom hasn’t mentioned her in a while and I can’t remember the last time I saw her.”

A name finally registered in his mind. “You said he stays mainly at your home and *Dagobah* beach? Isn’t that where most illegal trash dumps are?”

Hatsume nodded and wiped at her red eyes. “It’s also a great source of scrap and parts. That’s how we met actually,” she chuckled softly, glancing at Midoriya. “My parents run a mech shop and he started selling them parts he salvaged.”

All by himself? Shouta almost asked. “Bakugo, see if your mother has any means of contact with Midoriya’s mother.”

Whoever this woman was, wherever she disappeared to, it undoubtedly rested in Shouta's mind that she left her son alone for far too long. Exactly how long, he could only guess. As to why… he looked at Midoriya's pale face, his freckles splattered across his cheeks, and thought of how society would see him.

It only fueled the fire of fury within him to think of why Midoriya Inko would leave her son on his own.

Hatsume's mothers' arrival was akin to that of a strike of lightning.

Everyone already present in the room jolted at their sudden entrance. On their tail, Ectoplasm glided into the room, silent and serene. The shorter of the two looked like Hatsume's relative. Her hair, like her daughter's, was a salmon pink but it stood spiked on her head, close-cut to her head. Her golden eyes landed on Midoriya and her daughter at his side.

The lankier one stood silently at her side, like an executioner standing by her queen as she examined the room. Her dark skin and silver eyes swept over the room, her webbed appendages fluttering when she saw Midoriya. The gills in her neck vibrated slightly, a rumble sounding in the room.

Their daughter nodded at them, silently passing information, and Hatsume (the short-haired one- there were too many in the same room now) stalked over to Shuzenji, her figure looming over her with an expectant look plainly written across her face.

When they explained, their intimidating demeanors dropped and she sat heavily in a provided chair by her daughter. "I knew something was wrong, but not-" she lifted her head out of her hands and peered over to Midoriya. "Not this." Ayumi, as they'd thankfully been introduced, put a reassuring hand on her wife's shoulder.

"Mom, I need to go find Zuzu's journals," Mei said, standing from her seat. Determination blazed as she locked eyes with Shouta.

"Ectoplasm, could you escort Hatsume wherever she needs to go?"

"Of course." He inclined his head to the occupants of the room and they swiftly disappeared through the door.

"Do you have any information on Midoriya's mother?" He asked on a whim, figuring *why not,* at this point.

Ayumi's ear fins flared, shuttering in disdain, and she met his eyes with a glare.

Mitsu's response was a smothered snarl into her hands. "That *bitch?* Never had the chance to meet her. Good for her though," Her eyes glinted with rage. "because as soon as I see her, I'm going to sock her in her child-negligent face."

Bakugo shifted in the corner of the room.

"Anytime she comes up in a conversation, Izuku swerves *hard* to avoid answering. He doesn't mention her and from what Mei's told me, he barely ever stays in that apartment." She stopped and fixed her gaze onto Shouta, making sure he heard her. "The apartment, by the way, I've been inside a couple of times and it's- it's so *barren.* You wouldn't think a person lived there at all if you walked in. His room had a few items, notebooks and shit, but the other bedroom is completely devoid of knick-knacks and clutter."

"Are you aware that he stays at Dagobah beach as well?"

Her head snapped up. He'll take that as a no. "That *dump?"* She swore and curled her hands into tight fists. "Nah, to hell that, I'll fucking adopt him, I've been planning to anyway, and he can live with my us. My wife's fully on board, has been since she met him, and-" She cursed again and put her elbows on the bed. "How to convince his overly selfless ass, though. He'll say he's fucking fine and that we shouldn't worry, 'mom's just busy' my ass."

"Can you understand JSL?" Ayumi asked. Shouta signed the affirmative. *"I would like you to know that we're his family now, and I don't particularly care if that woman comes back. We love him and the only reason I would ever want her near him was so that she may apologize for being such a subpar mother."*

Shouta gave her an appraising look and decided he liked her. "It sounds like there's a general consensus surrounding Midoriya's mother." He glanced at the boy, watching the rise and fall of his chest. "Getting this done won't be easy." Shouta had a feeling he didn't need to reference *what* wouldn't be easy.

"I know. God, *I know,* but we can't just-"

"We have connections in the police force that will look into his situation but the best we can offer him would be to put him under the temporary guardianship of a teacher here using the school's guidelines

to ensure that he is being taken care of."

"And if he told us everything?"

"Then he'd be in a proper home in a third of the time, but most kids in his situation don't spill their guts because they're promised something better than what they have."

"How long will it take to put him under your care?" Ayumi asked, pinning him with her metallic stare.

"My care?"

"Yeah, we assumed you were going to take him," Mitsu said, her eyes narrowing.

"I'd need to talk it over with my husband first." He knew though, that Hizashi would never turn Midoriya away. "But, you're right, that is my intention."

"Then let's get detailed."

The rhythmic beeping near him was the first thing he noticed. Opening his eyes to see the colorless ceiling, the pain in his head grew quiet, hushed by the darkness surrounding him. The panic that arose inside him as his memories returned *(Eraserhead, expressionless, and still under the influence of his quirk)* reached the monitor before he fully processed it.

Would they let him stay, after this? He used his quirk on a hero. He attacked a *teacher.*

Izuku prayed that Eraserhead was okay.

Did he hate him now?

He didn't want Eraserhead to hate him.

Fuck, he hadn't even made it past his homeroom class! What time was it? Maybe he could-

An unsympathetic 1:42 stared him down from above the door.

His eyes burned with unshed tears. *Don't cry.* He pushed himself up

into a sitting position. *Don't fucking breathe,* his voice hissed bitterly, *then maybe you can forget how badly you screwed up.*

No one else lay asleep, or otherwise, in the room. It was just him and his thoughts as they fought and shoved to consume him in their frenzy of emotions.

Izuku grieved for his lost chances, for the doors that opened only to surely be slammed in his face. He raged at himself, sick of how he always threw away what he craved. Fingers curling around his arms with a bruising grip, he hugged himself, desperately searching for any sort of reprieve from this nightmare, from himself.

A sob ripped out of his throat, broken and rough. One of his hands pulled at his hair in frustration *(in shame, in hatred)* and he closed his eyes in a futile attempt to halt the hot streams of water pouring out.

Minutes passed.

Izuku carefully swung his legs off the bed. His entire body felt stiff, a familiar sensation, disturbingly enough. Dying more than once was usually not something a person, let alone a child could attest to. Resuscitation involved multiple compressions to his chest. *Hard* compressions. As in, he felt it now, and it would probably stay with him longer than the stiffness in his body.

The tile floor sent chills up from his feet the moment he made contact with the cold surface. The IV in his arm held him close to the bed but allowed him a few steps of freedom. The last thing he needed right now was to take out his IV and have people barging in thinking he died or something.

Hunger announced itself loudly with a rumble from his stomach.

He should just leave. No one would want him around anymore, so why not leave?

They're going to be so disappointed. Izuku cringed at the thought of the Hatsumes' reaction. *I already ruined my chances.*

The door opened soundlessly. Izuku watched, frozen, as Eraserhead stepped in the room with a coffee and a bun holding his hair up. They locked eyes and stared at each other for a few moments, the clock ticking audibly in the thick silence.

"Am I being expelled?"

If the question took him by surprise, he didn't show it. "For?" he asked in a tone softer than any teacher had ever used with him.

Izuku's face scrunched up in confusion. "What'd you mean 'for'? I've read all those long-winded rules for grounds of expulsion and suspension." He glared at his teacher's blank expression. "I used my quirk on you, a teacher. Severity and situation of the matter at hand and in context, I attacked you unprovoked and trapped you with my quirk. That puts me in the red zone. I missed all my classes but homeroom, you *look* okay but-" He scanned Eraserhead critically, despair written helplessly across his face. "Did I hurt you?"

"No, Midoriya, and you're not being expelled."

The relief had him leaning on the bed again. *Thank god, Mei would have killed me.*

"We do, however, have some questions," Izuku looked up and nodded. Of course they would, given everything that occurred.

"Would you be willing to answer some now, or would you prefer to wait until morning?"

"I'm fine doing it now, sir." He was not fine. The very idea of being questioned about any of the events that took place yesterday sent alarm bells ringing through his head and made it harder to breathe.

"What made you dissociate?"

Right into it, huh? No prep? Just- Just going for the jugular. "This place is too new," Izuku replied uncomfortably. "And I'm too used to being in my middle school."

"And what about your middle school made this the norm?"

"I don't- I didn't get lost in my head often," Izuku said firmly. "I just got… scared." he finished lamely.

"Of what?"

"I got beat up a lot in middle school," he confessed, feeling his face heat up. "People liked to break my things. But I swear I never used my quirk on them! If I did, I don't think I'd be here now." He tapered off with a nervous chuckle.

Eraserhead's expression shifted slightly. "Because of your quirk or

because of the students at your old school?" he asked carefully.

"My quirk!" Izuku threw out quickly. "Sure, they all hated me, but they would never go as far as-"

"Were you protecting your notebook?"

Izuku's mind snapped out of his defensive stupor in an instant. "Excuse me?"

Eraserhead turned and grabbed something off of a nearby table. His notebook, he realized, but not his current one. "These contain in-depth analyses of heroes and villains alike, sketches, as well as questions and observations. You have listed flaws and limitations pertaining to their quirks and their skill sets. There are even suggestions for how they might improve themselves." Eraserhead looked down at the worn notebook he held loosely in his hand. "There are multiple scenarios written about how to effectively take down each of your entries.

"I know the Support Department would go crazy over some of these designs for gear. You could make an insane amount of profit advising heroes and helping them improve if their pride could handle you scrutinizing everything they have yet to improve on."

Izuku's face burned, suddenly taking inventory of the fact that *all* his notebooks were stacked behind Eraserhead. He picked up Izuku's previous notebook, the one Bakugo blew up. "There are several with torn pages and crispy edges, it's no wonder you felt threatened when you thought you were back in hostile territory."

"W-Why do you have all my notebooks?" He squeaked, eyeing the bright colors of his first few journals. God, he'd gotten those when he was *six!* Why were they all here?

"We thought we might find something about your quirk in one of them. Instead, we found a breakdown of all our staff and too many heroes to count. Very dangerous information you've compiled in all these.

"I like the ideas you have down for my goggles, Mic certainly got a kick out of your word vomit."

"Thank y-you, Eraserhead."

He glanced at Izuku. "Call me Aizawa, kid. I'm your teacher."

“O-Okay,” he agreed.

“I’m off track.”Aizawa set his notebook down. “What’s your quirk?”

Izuku’s flush disappeared, leaving him pale. His hands fidgeted as he avoided his teacher’s eyes. “I-It’s, well, I don’t actually know that much about it-”

“Do you always die when you use it?”

“No, but it always hurts.” He clenched his jaw. “I can’t lose focus either, or else I might accidentally use it on someone.”

Aizawa leaned forward, catching his eye for a moment. “What does that mean?”

“M-My quirk, it’s touch-based but all it needs to activate is skin on skin, I don’t need all five fingers.” Izuku peered down at his hands. “I used to wear gloves but…”

“But?”

“I couldn’t keep buying new ones.”

The silence, though it only lasted a second, made Izuku stiffen.

“I didn’t see much when you used your quirk on me, it was all dark. I could only see myself and then I heard my own voice. Something started coming into view and then you pulled me out.”

Izuku sighed in relief. “That’s good,” he muttered, relaxing slightly.

“What would I have seen if you hadn’t pulled me out?”

He said it cautiously, like he knew Izuku possessed a quirk that could hurt everyone he touched. The careful flatness of his tone nagged at Izuku's nerves, his instincts demanding he lie, skirt the truth, anything to keep him safe and unhated.

“Sir, I- well, I honestly don’t know what you would have seen.” Izuku started. “I’ve only purposefully used my quirk a few times and one of those was forced. That’s the only reason I know anything about my quirk in the first place. It’s not exactly like any of them told me what I did to them.”

“What do you know?”

Izuku took a deep breath, psyching himself to tell his teacher something he had never once said aloud to anyone. He hesitated, terror shooting through him at the thought, but he- fuck. Fuck it all because here he *finally was.* He was at *UA* and even though they might chuck him out for having a quirk like his (he *seriously* contemplated lying outright and saying he didn't know jack about his quirk), he had a chance to stay. Stay and learn how to be a proper hero, to learn how to save people and be *good.*

Izuku wanted to be a hero.

"My quirk, when activated, puts a person at war with everything they think is wrong with themselves." He looked away from Aizawa in shame, praying that he wouldn't be disgusted with him. "I-I've really tried to keep my quirk off since I couldn't wear gloves-"

"You've been actively suppressing your quirk?" Aizawa interjected urgently. "When did you start?"

Izuku's mind brought forth the memory of gloves smacking him in his face, his mother a few feet away from him, a mix of bewilderment and anger staring him down as she ordered him to put them on and made him promise to never take them off.

"Don't touch me," Her voice shook, but he could tell it wasn't from fear. "Don't touch anybody ever again!"

Her shouts echoed inside his head, the gloves too big, the air outside too warm, as he wandered around the apartment complex. She didn't want him to touch her because of his quirk. So that meant she would be nice if she knew he wouldn't ever use it, right?

"I think I was five."

He says it as if he was encased in a memory again and, judging by the distant look in his eyes, he definitely had something on his mind that he didn't bring up.

Shouta's brain screamed distress and demanded retribution for whoever put it in this kid's head at *five years old* that his quirk was so utterly horrible that he needed to concentrate to keep it completely off.

“Five?” He said instead of the curse that nearly came out in a hoarse whisper. *“Five?* Midoriya, no wonder you nearly died using it!”

The kid, that goddamn problem child, flinched and looked up at him with those wide emerald eyes, confusion gleaming in their depths. “What do you mean?”

Says the quirk analyst, Shouta hisses. “Quirks are extensions of us, Midoriya. They are an evolved supergene that manifested and wove into our DNA. It is a part of your very being that you have focussed on keeping down. For ten-” He stops and holds his coffee mug tighter. “You’ve denied your body and mind access to your quirk and it puts too much stress on you when you do allow it some leeway. Ten years of constant suppression and then sudden usage would kill anybody.”

The realization that dawned on his face let Shouta feel some sort of relief. At least he knew the *why* now. But this new development glared in the face of any comfort he’d found. He met many who disliked, who hated, and loathed their quirks but only a rare few of them ever admitted to shoving their quirks away instead of simply ignoring them.

Skin on skin contact initiates the possibility of his quirk activating if he doesn’t concentrate. Uniforms took care of most exposed skin but his hands, his body from the neck up, he couldn’t cover them.

Except he had gloves, part of him seethes, *gloves that he ‘couldn’t keep buying’.*

That meant someone destroyed them. Someone stole a safeguard and a reason to let himself relax his focus.

“Let me be clear, Midoriya,” Shouta said calmly. “Do *not* suppress your quirk anymore. We will provide you with gloves if you need us to and I am going to offer you quirk counseling so that we may train you to safely use your quirk without such deadly consequences.”

“B-But, what if-”

“What if you need to use your quirk and you can’t?” Shouta cut in, his eyes glaring down at him. “What if you *do* use it and you *die?* What then? Is there someone to resuscitate you or do you just die because you’re too scared of your own quirk?” He paused, pinching the bridge of his nose. “You have potential, Midoriya. Be rational and accept UA’s help. Accept *my* help.”

Midoriya stared at his bed, thinking hard for a few moments. When he looked back up, Shouta resisted the urge to grin.

“I accept your offer, Aizawa-sensei.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for the kudos!!

Izuku's a badass and now everybody in 1A knows it

Chapter Notes

This ended up being pretty long!

Dadmic and Dadwaza! Hitoshi! My beautiful Hastume moms!

Also- there is a part where a panic attack occurs. While I'm not necessarily great a descriptions, just be warned and stay safe kids

Writing Tokoyami's dialogue makes me feel so out of my league. guys I am not equipped

Edit:3/8/2021
Edit:3/9/2021

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“‘Can I go to class’?” Recovery Girl mocked with distaste.

“I feel fine, I promise!” Izuku pleaded, attempting to placate Recovery Girl.

She scoffed, Aizawa walking in with another cup of coffee. “You were dead for two minutes several hours ago. You are not going to class.”

Izuku dropped his head into his hands and groaned in despair. They’d been doing this for five minutes, her shoving medical jargon down his throat, him refusing to swallow it. Aizawa didn’t seem to be inclined to argue on either of their behalf, which Izuku wasn’t sure whether he should be irritated about or not.

“No offense, but I have more experience with this than you do. I know I’m okay!” He insisted. “The first time it happened, I walked home with stiff muscles, slept, and went to school the next day, good as new. The stiffness passed so I’m good to go.” Good as new was stretching it a little. The day after the Sludge Villain incident Izuku had nearly skipped school because of how terrible his body felt.

Apparently, being nearly suffocated to death and, later, actually dying was not the best thing for one’s body.

She pressed her lips into a tight line. “How many times has this

happened, exactly?" Recovery Girl stepped closer. "Who helped you afterward?"

Nobody, he almost snapped. "It only happened one other time, now will you please let me go to my classes? I already missed pretty much the entire first day."

"Young man, I assure you, your excuse is irrefutable." She tapped her cane on the tiled flooring and glanced back at his file. "You woke up thirty minutes ago, I still need to give you a thorough check."

"Homeroom is in an hour!" He turned to Aizawa, searching for any kind of assistance he might find. "C'mon, I haven't even been able to see the Hatsumes yet."

"Ah, there arises a topic your teacher avoided during your early morning discussion." Recovery Girl turned around, shuffling to her desk.

"What?" Izuku glanced between the two adults, unease welling up within him.

Aizawa sighed, eyeing his defensively drawn-up shoulders. "We know you live alone, Midoriya."

Izuku froze, then peered back at the notebooks stacked neatly on the counter. He cursed the lack of information on his file, knowing that there were no people aside from the Hatsumes listed as his emergency contacts. He should have put together that Mei gathered all his notebooks for them, possibly with a teacher. That meant they knew about Dagobah, and Aizawa clearly stated that *they knew he lived alone-*

How did he explain this? What reply would make them leave him be and let him return to the beach, where the waves still reached his little space carved out in a heap of metal. What could he say to them for him to be allowed back to the Hatsumes' house without fanfare? How did he get back to the comforting warmth, to the never silent home the Hatsumes had given him?

"My mom's job requires her to be far away. She doesn't like the idea of me being alone so I spend a lot of time with the Hatsumes." His voice is surprisingly steady but he could hear the brittleness to his voice. If they tried to bend him, he would shatter.

"And your place at Dagobah beach?"

“Mei and I spend a lot of time there so I thought it’d be nice to have a resting place where we could just sit around together.” She told them about it. Mei searched it for his notebooks, presumably with a teacher present. *Mei told them about it.* Izuku leaned back onto the bed, putting his hands onto the sheets to hide their trembling.

“The Hatsumes say they haven’t seen your mother once in all the time they’ve known you. Bakugo says he hasn’t seen her in years and his mother stopped talking with her a long time ago.”

Izuku was pulled from his thoughts, harshly thrown back into reality. “Bakugo?” Kac- Nope. Bakugo. *Bak-u-go.* “He was here?”

“He’s the only other person we know that has had experience with your quirk,” Aizawa says. “But let’s not stray from the topic at hand. Your apartment is barren of anything that would make it a home, including a few basic items.”

“I’m minimalistic.”

“Even if that was a good answer, minimalists still *eat,* Midoriya.”

“Who says I don’t?”

“The lack of virtually any food except for granola bars.”

“Ah, but the granola bars-”

“Are not a meal,” Recovery Girl said shortly.

“I eat with the Hatsumes.”

“So I’ve heard. You eat with them each day. Is your mother so preoccupied that she has absolutely zero time to spend with her son?”

Abruptly, he asked. “Why isn’t she on your emergency contact list?”

Izuku’s eyes twitched, internally scrambling to patch each hole Aizawa poked in his story. Was he abruptly changing the topic to try and catch him off guard? Was that what this was? Still, Izuku hesitates, even though he knows it’ll be the death of him, and sighed. “Look, she’s too far away to come around if anything happens to me. She’s on planes half the time, too, so it’s not like she’s available at any time.” Knowing full well that she wouldn’t give a flying fuck about anything that happened yesterday, Izuku wondered if his mother was in planes often

Aizawa doesn't pause. "What is her phone number?"

Izuku knows he isn't leaving with his life intact. Not when his teacher is being so damn nosy. "I don't know," Izuku muttered, an icy feeling spreading through him.

"Does she not call you? From what we know, she doesn't visit you."

"She's- She's just busy, okay?" His voice was failing him now, old lies he used to tell himself coming out cracked and quiet. "She didn't abandon me."

The rapid-fire questions stopped, Aizawa's voice unfaltering and firm. "Midoriya Izuku, under the power of the Pro Hero ChildCare Acts, I invoke an emergency foster license and revoke your mother's guardianship, effective immediately. You will be staying with my husband and I until your home situation has been thoroughly investigated. If it is deemed fit for you, you may return. If not, we will have to discuss more permanent actions being taken."

Izuku blinked and stared directly into his hero's eyes, attempting to gauge whether or not he was serious. "Really?" he asked, drawing out the word. He looked at Recovery Girl, who gave her full attention to the document she wrote on, and frowned at the glimpse of amusement he caught. "Can he really do that? Is that allowed?"

"Yes," She answered decisively. "Behave for him and Yamada, would you?"

Who the hell was *Yamada?* Izuku wouldn't be going off to live with people he didn't know. No way in hell. "But-"

"The Hatsumes have graciously offered their services to pack your belongings while school is in session,"Aizawa stated, cutting him off. "We will be meeting them at your apartment to make sure they didn't miss anything and then we will go to my home."

"Hold o-on-"

"Recovery Girl, I'll be expecting him in class." With a nod to her, he left the room.

A moment of silence filled the room, static filling Izuku's ears.

"Fine, you're free to go after this check up." She muttered with a scowl.

The uniform they gave him was too big. Not enough to hinder him but enough for him to notice. The gloves he wore were meant for when he worked with Mei, so they were kind of bulky and not meant for wearing during everyday life.

Not that it mattered.

It was such a slight change compared to everything else, so why the hell would it matter when his sense of normalcy and his life was going to be uprooted?

Was this why people said the first days of school were the worst? Was this why people said school was hell? His experience felt unique. He certainly hoped no one else had to go through what he had.

Regardless, too much shit happened.

Let's check things off, see where Izuku feels like he wants to go apeshit, and go from there! He made it into the hero course! *Yay!* He went to class and did *not* get expelled, but people stared and commented on his scars. *Not the best, but alright.* At the end of homeroom he had a flashback and accidentally attacked his teacher with his quirk. *Not good, not fucking good, man.* Then he *died* and was resuscitated. *Could have gone worse? I guess?* He missed all of his goddamn classes and his notebooks were thoroughly looked through by his *teachers. They probably saw all the fucking comments I made about their costumes and gear. They hate me now, don't they?* They only have his notebooks because Mei searched for them and somehow brought them all. *Mei told them. Mei told them. Mei told them.* He was offered quirk training. *Nerve-racking and terrifying, but kind of nice to think about.*

What else? Oh, let's see…

His teacher forcibly acquired guardianship over him! There we go, that's the kicker. Now, not only does he not get to return to Dagobah or the Hatsumes' house, but he's being forced to live at *Aizawa's* instead. A man, who he trusts as a hero. A man, who he does not know in the slightest. All he really knows is that he is a teacher and that does absolutely nothing to quell his concern.

Here? Here seems like a good place to lose his goddamn mind.

Izuku stopped his stroll in the middle of the sidewalk and looked over at the entrance gate of the school. Maybe if he ran now he would be able to escape to… somewhere. The Hatsumes were in on this scheme, a fact he bitterly wished to ignore, so going to them to hide would only lead him back here.

He ran his gloved hand over the too-large sleeve of his uniform and tugged the end of the sleeve. Sighing, he resolved to await whatever the day would bring him and roll with the punches like he always did.

Sooner than he thought, he stumbled across his first weird thing of the day.

Tokoyami, who was kneeling by a bird feeder.

Izuku crept up on him, peering over him to watch as he handed his odd shadow companion bird seeds. “He can eat?” Izuku questioned.

Both beings jolted, his presence taking them by surprise.

“Oh, uh, sorry. Hi, I’m Midoriya.” He introduced, stepping back. “I’m in your class.”

“Indeed,” Tokoyami said, rising to his feet. “You were the enigma who vanished. You caused quite the stir.”

“Stir?” The shadow figure laughed. “This kid *disappeared* and from what we saw and Shoji heard, he should still be with Recovery Girl.”

“What you saw?” Izuku echoed nervously.

Tokoyami glanced at him. “In the classroom, we found blood pooled on the ground and splattered across a desk. Naturally, we have been concerned.”

Izuku let out a squeaky “huh”, tugging at his gloves. “Yeah, I-I can see where you’re coming from.”

“I will not pry, but do exercise caution. You are an intriguing character who I would loathe the demise of.” He gently pet the shadow, which stayed small at his side.

“Thanks,” he gave them a smile.

“So, uh, do you have a name?” Izuku said to the purple-black bird thing. He sort of reminded him of Kurogiri, with his similar colors and glowing yellow eyes.

“His name is Dark Shadow, he is my companion.” Dark Shadow nodded and waved one of his clawed hands at him.

“It’s nice to meet both of you!” Izuku said cheerily, offering a toothy smile.

Tokoyami stared at his face for a moment, then laughed when Dark Shadow hid behind him.

“Sorry!” Izuku spat out quickly. “Did I do something?”

Tokoyami shook his head, a grin spread across his face. “No, you have not committed a misdeed,” he assured. “Dark Shadow just tends to shy away from brightness.” He paused, meeting Izuku’s eyes. “You are very bright.”

Izuku tilted his head to the side for a moment, unsure of what he meant. The meaning clicked and he felt heat rise to his cheeks, eyes widening as they both kept staring at him. “O-Oh, um, t-thank you.” Izuku played with the end of his sleeve. “I h-hope we’ll get to know each other better.”

Tokoyami smiled down at him and Dark Shadow winked. “Class will begin soon, we should travel to our homeroom.”

“Y-Yeah!” Izuku agreed.

When they walked in, their small talk was immediately cut short by Iida rushing over to them, his hand slicing down in front of Izuku.

“Midoriya!” Wow, look at that, *everyone* was staring at him now. “Are you alright? We are all very concerned!”

Izuku inched past him, waving goodbye to Tokoyami and a receding Dark Shadow. “Yeah, I’m fine! No need to worry, Iida.”

But, despite his claims, when he sat down at his desk, everyone, sans Bakugo, was most definitely waiting for an explanation.

“What the hell are you extras doing by my fucking desk?”

Oh thank god, Bakugo’s here.

Huh. He never thought that would be a sentence he would say.

“We’re worried about Midoriya, man!” Kaminari shouted. “We weren’t allowed to see him and there was a ton of blood-“

“Not my fucking problem, dunce face.” He set his bag down and scowled at their classmates, ignoring their protests. “Beat it.” he ground out.

Nicely enough, they did scatter, going back to their own groups.

Aizawa entered, ordering silence.

Izuku refused to look at him.

He had entirely forgotten about their hero course lesson. With *All Might.*

Fuuuuuucckkk.

He really didn’t want to deal with his righteousness right now.

“I AM ENTERING THE ROOM LIKE A NORMAL PERSON!”

Izuku groaned internally, resigning himself to the overwhelming exasperation.

When they changed into their costumes no one made a comment on his scars but he felt their eyes. He brushed it off; he dealt with it before, he could handle it now.

His costume was a dark green jumpsuit, holsters and pockets present for his support gear. He wore black gloves that ended above his elbows under the jacket he made and pulled up his hood, fixing it into place. His respirator could lay on his neck for the moment until he knew what they would be doing. Goggles sat at the top of his head, black and akin to Eraserhead’s in style.

Hatsume Ayumi and Mitsu were both trained in combat. Granted, they mainly knew self defense, but that was a major step towards a decent offense. They gladly taught him what they knew. Falling right, training your body to react with form in mind, how to block and slip from someone’s grasp, they taught him and Mei everything.

“Wow, Midoriya, that costume is so cool!” Uraraka said, appearing at his side. Her voice dropped and she gave him a sideways glance. “You actually are okay, right? You don’t need to sit out or something?”

Izuku nodded firmly. She nodded back, accepting his answer.

“Man, all of you got such cool outfits!” Hagakure whined, her gloved hands twisting in the air.

“I… have to agree.” Yaoyorozu looked down at her outfit with a pinched face. “This leaves something to be desired.”

Izuku looked between them with mild confusion. “You both know they could have made your costume with your hair or something, right? They take your DNA and incorporate it so that it works with your quirk.”

“What.” Hagakure deadpanned as Yaoyorozu struggled to find the right words, settling for a miserable groan.

“If you contact the department, they won’t refuse you. If they do then I think you should report them.”

“For what?” A nasally voice snickered. “Liking the ladies?”

Izuku grabbed the purple-haired boy by the back of his clothing and pulled him away from the girls. “Touch them without their permission, and I’ll punt you into a wall.” He warned.

“ARE YOU READY TO BEGIN?” He let go and the boy scrambled to make an escape. The girls gave him thankful smiles of respect.

Izuku ended up being teamed with Kirishima against Shoji and Todoroki.

They’d be going first, pleasantly enough. Izuku wanted to be able to observe without worrying about his own match. For now though, he had ten minutes to come up with a plan to protect their bomb.

“Your quirk is hardening,” he stated, loading his gun. “I can’t use a quirk, but that hardly matters.”

“Hey, Midoriya, about yesterday-“

“We can talk about that later.” Izuku cut him off. “We’re against two powerhouses and we don’t have time to waste. Are you willing to make a plan with me?”

Kirishima looked put out, like he still wanted to say something. “Yeah, let’s win this.”

Izuku grinned. “Alright, give me feedback as I start saying things because I tend to talk a lot.

“Right, so, Todoroki has a temperature manipulation quirk but he’s frozen his left side, maybe he won’t use his fire? From what I gather, he’s got extraordinary ability and control, he could, theoretically, try to freeze us out.”

“What’d we do then?”

Izuku raised an eyebrow, raising his gloved hand. “Your quirk should be able to break through ice and my gloves aren’t just for show. They are useful.”

“Good points, good points.”

“After that, they’ll come in. Todoroki seems like the loner type but Shoji is friendly enough to try and plan with him. His quirk is great for surveillance but he’s strong too. I think you should guard the bomb, Kirishima, while I be the first line of defense. My support gear works long and short-range and I don’t know how much training you have in close combat fighting. Your quirk requires it but do you know proper fighting techniques?”

“I started going to a class during middle school.” He shrugged. “I’m still not great at fighting with technique but I can brute force my way through a lot.”

“Then yeah, I should go out. Do you know how to shoot?” His puzzled look was enough of an answer. He unloaded a few smaller pieces of ammunition and placed them in a bag, offering them.

“These won’t explode right?” He said as Izuku handed them off. “You’re not gonna blow me up like the Zero-pointer?”

Izuku laughed. “These are sticky bombs. When they hit something they’ll explode and trap someone under them.” Izuku handed him another few in a separate pouch. “These are for if you hit someone in the face or you need to get them out quickly. Just crush them in your hand over the substance and it will release the person. Use them accordingly and definitely keep your quirk in mind if you end up fighting.”

“I just gotta throw ‘em?”

“Yup. Be careful though, don’t accidentally activate them. They’re frozen now and if we’re lucky Todoroki will provide us with some premium ice to keep ‘em nice and chilly until you might have to put them to use. Not too cold though, or else they’ll bounce right off their

target.” He drew a breath. “If I come across both of them, the fight might end pretty quickly depending on their coordination,” Izuku confessed, fiddling with his firearm.

“And if they split up?”

“You sure know how to cheer a guy up,” Izuku answered, matching his teammate’s grin. “If they split up I would have to worry about Shoji alerting Todoroki to my every move or Todoroki- well, then I’d just have to deal with Todoroki.”

“You have enough to defend yourself with? Do you have a plan of attack cooked up?”

“‘Course I do!” Izuku said. “Shoji relies on his senses to tell him where someone is and I can use that against him. His strength and many limbs could definitely be troublesome if he gets close but I don't intend to let that happen. Todoroki on the other hand could go either way.”

“Because he might not use his fire? That would definitely work better for close range than his ice.”

“You are so right but I kind of meant that when people have flashy quirks they tend to rely on them almost entirely. He might not know how to handle a fistfight.” Izuku peered up at Kirishima. “Or he could be. He’s a little hard to read with all the silence.”

“Are you telling me he’s essentially a pass-fail?”

“Yeah, but if he gets past me I’m confident in your abilities.”

Kirishima flashed him a sharp-toothed smile. “Thanks, Midoriya!”

“Also,” Izuku added, meeting Kirishima’s gaze. “Radio silence will likely be the best course of action.”

“Right, yeah, Shoji could totally mess us up if he overheard us.”

They nodded at each other, trusting that their partner would do their part.

“TIME’S UP! HEROES, YOU MAY ENTER!”

Izuku nodded in unison with his partner, turning to the door only to watch it be encased in ice. Ice that was quickly coming at him. “Jump!” He called out, leaping out to the already frozen floor. Frost

crawled up his legs, puffs of air becoming visible in the cold.

Kirishima broke his leg out of a patch of ice, shivering. Izuku looked at the door, then at his teammate, before pushing himself back across the ice to him. “What are you..” Izuku ignored him, handing off his jacket.

“It’s got heaters in the lining,” Izuku said as he moved back to the door. His gloves radiated heat, water running down the door. He waved to Kirishima without looking back and left the room, closing the door softly behind him.

Pulling his goggles down, he switched to thermal vision, striding down the hallways until he caught sight of Todoroki. He was alone, half cold, half lukewarm, likely from his iced side. Izuku focused as Todoroki turned a corner, head in into the hallway where he’d hopefully meet his demise. He switched back to normal sight and looked down at the gun in his hand.

He’d given Kirishima three rounds, leaving him with two sticky bombs. For Shoji, if he showed his face, he had his own unharmful flash-bangs and some awful smelling gas in a capsule. He would have to use them sparingly.

Todoroki turned the final corner into Izuku’s path. He lunged at the unsuspecting student, knocking into him and leading with a hard crack at his face. Todoroki stumbled but managed to push him back, throwing a layer of ice Izuku’s way. He surged over the wave and out of the corner pocket, to the hallway. Todoroki glared, sending another wave of ice. Izuku jumped the hurdle and fired at an angle.

The momentum smacked them both into a wall on their ends of the hallway but Todoroki, for all his struggling, couldn’t break free from the goop that held his right side against the wall. Ice still came but Izuku dodged and rolled and leaped until the capture tape was secured around his right arm.

“TODOROKI HAS BEEN CAPTURED!”

Izuku shuddered and pressed his gloves to the ice that encased the lower half of his body. *God,* he was cold. He stepped away with wet clothes, activating his thermal vision again to see Shoji entering the building at a swift pace. Shivering in the frozen building, Izuku turned to Todoroki. “Freeze that shit and it’ll take longer to get it off, heat it up and it’ll just expand. I’ll get you out after this is over.”

Taking off down the hall, he readied his mini arsenal and reloaded his gun. The pathway he'd come from was effectively blocked by Todoroki's ice, leaving him to find another way to get back to Kirishima. He had a sinking feeling that his plan wouldn't work as well as he wanted it to. He would slow Shoji down but if he didn't want to be captured, he would need to lead Shoji back to Kirishima to waste his time and let Kirishima attack, hopefully by then the time would be up.

He was close enough. Shoji would have heard him by now. He secured his mask.

Darting into the hallway Shoji was in, he threw out the capsule and a watered-down flash-bang. His goggles and mouth cover protected him but Shoji cried out at the assault. He charged and pushed off the wall, flying over Shoji. Izuku ran, his shoes aiding in his pseudo escape.

Shoji in hot pursuit, he did his best to avoid the tentacles that shot at him every two seconds as he led him back up the building. In all honesty, it wasn't his best plan to lead the enemy to the prize but Shoji might notice a wild goose chase and if he finished Izuku off, Kirishima would have no back up in a fight with him.

Something latched onto his ankle.

He crashed into the ground, the hard thud audible as he saw stars. Rolling over, Izuku threw out his last flash-bang. Scrambling out of his hold, Izuku realized they were coming up on the room with Kirishima and the bomb. He didn't know how much time Shoji had but if his tentacles lashing out at half the speed they were before was any indication, Izuku would bet it was nearly up.

"Kirishima! Incoming!" Izuku yelled into the comms, sprinting into the last hallway to the room. He slapped a tentacle away and burst into the room, shooting to the side instead of running straight. Something behind him made contact with a *splat* and Izuku rushed to Kirishima's side, panting and shaking.

The bomb had been pushed to the corner of the room, too far for Shoji to reach as Kirishima pelted him with all three bombs. Only his head stayed visible over the expanded slime compound.

"SHOJI HAS BEEN IMMOBILIZED! VILLAINS WIN!" All Might

declared.

Izuku huffed and took off his mask and goggles. “Yay.” He offered breathlessly to Kirishima who whooped and rushed to free Shoji.

“Let’s g-get Todoroki,” Izuku said as Shoji stepped away from the doorway he had been glued to. His face ached from its meeting with the floor and his shoulder pulsed with pain and *fuck,* it was still so *cold.* He wrapped his arms around his middle and attempted to fight the sluggishness.

A small weight was added onto his shoulders and warmth encased his upper body. He melted into it, knees going weak at the relief. Hands steadied him and he stilled at the touch. It receded as fast as it appeared, gone in an instant.

“Sorry,” Kirishima said sheepishly, then smiled. “Thanks for the jacket, it’s really nice.”

His eyelids drooped.

The hands were back, this time he allowed himself to lean into them. More appeared and he was lifted off the ground, more warmth following as he was wrapped in something. His whole body continued to tremble but he stayed awake.

When they arrived at Todoroki, Izuku had to be let out of Shoji’s arms to give them the anti-stick. His hands shook embarrassingly as he handed them to Kirishima, who threw him a concerned look.

“You have a fire quirk, right?” Kirishima pointed out. “Use it to help him warm up.”

His toes were numb when they exited the building but at least he could feel his *fingers.* Todoroki’s left hand stayed on his back, a constant presence of heat adding to his jacket’s. The building was indeed unfrozen and when they arrived back to the group Izuku, accompanied by the human space heater, Todoroki, was immediately sent to see Recovery Girl.

Damn, that put quite the hole in his plan to observe his classmates’ styles and quirks. He hadn’t thought about what might happen if he got injured. There was a fleeting thought that Recovery Girl might be able to get him back to class quickly enough for him to catch the rest of the classes’ matches.

Recovery Girl was *not* happy to see him. She muttered profusely about hypothermia and the unnecessary stress on his body. She ordered him to change out of his wet costume and told Todoroki to stay where he was.

The rest of class came and went, Recovery Girl allowing them both to leave for lunch.

At least I'll get to see the rest of them after lunch.

"Sorry," he blurted as they walked through the hallways. "For making you use your quirk on me." Izuku clarified.

"My ice was the reason you were put in this position in the first place." He said flatly.

Izuku hummed. "Yeah, but you don't seem to like heating things up with your quirk. I'm surprised you wouldn't just use your quirk on both sides but maybe it's easier to use it on one side compared to another? If you'd allow me to, I'd like to ask you about it later, but that's besides that point. You covered the hot half of your body with ice a-and so I thought you m-might have an aversion or b-bad memories-" Izuku stopped, feeling a cosmic hand settle on his shoulder and say: *Shut the fuck up.*

"Sorry," he said again.

"What do you mean 'both sides'? I can only use my ice on my right side."

Thank you, God, for giving me something else to ramble about. "Well, no one has two quirks, but there are some like yours; duel quirks, or quirk that may act as two separate forces. Yours is temperature based and maybe your cells are split like your hair is, but you might be able to channel the rise or fall of the temperature on your other side if you practice or simply focus."

"You think I might be able to use her ice on my left side?" There was something in his voice, something fragile and hopeful that Izuku wanted to assure.

Her ice? "It's a hypothesis, but yeah, it's a definite possibility." He nudged Todoroki with his elbow, throwing a playful smile his way. "But, you *have* to work on close range combat. It's so obvious you don't know how to fight without your quirk."

“My father says with a quirk as powerful as mine, I wouldn’t need that.” Bitterness lay in his tone, the air becoming thicker to Izuku.

“That’s such bullshit,” he laughed, apparently taking Todoroki by surprise. “In a fight against someone like Eraserhead, you’d be toast. People with non-physical quirk tend to have resentment to those that do and they have to work twice as hard to get to the same place.” He coughed, suddenly aware of what he said. “N-Not that you don’t work hard! I’m sure you earned your place here just like everyone else!”

Todoroki’s blank expression was betrayed by the upturning of his lips. “Actually, it’s common knowledge that I got in on a recommendation.”

“But there are so many recommended students that get turned away! You and Yaoyorozu must be incredibly talented to have made it in!”

A hand landed on his shoulder, light and warm, but Izuku still flinched back. Todoroki retracted his hand, his face carefully neutral once more. “Thank you for your confidence, Midoriya, but I assure you that I was not offended by your statements.”

“Oh, okay.”

“You aren’t wrong, to say I rely too much on my quirk. I could use a teacher.”

Perking up, Izuku nodded rapidly. “I know a couple of women who are absolutely amazing-“

“No,” Todoroki interrupted. “I want to learn from you. You beat me with efficiency, evaded Shoji, a multi-limbed, strong opponent, and won.”

“K-Kirishima-“

“Did not face us head-on. From what Shoji and Kirishima relayed to me, you were incredible in their eyes as well.”

“You guys h-had time to talk?” Izuku inquired, desperate to distract himself from how warm he felt. He knew he must look like a tomato from the neck up.

“Yes. You were very out of it while we were leaving Ground Beta.”

“W-When would y-you be free? You know, to meet with me?”

“I have time this afternoon, we could meet in one of the gyms.”

This afternoon. He was supposed to meet with Aizawa and the Hatsumes, maybe even his husband, and pick up his stuff. But Todoroki had the time and Izuku certainly didn't agree with any of Aizawa's plans.

"Gym Gamma?" Izuku said.

"Right after school would be best. I'll get permission."

Midoriya was a curious person. That is, to say, Shouto didn't know how to feel about him. He utilized the obvious amount of intelligence he had and was physically trained as well. In Shouto's eyes, he should be a competitor, someone to surpass. That's it.

But he also didn't live up to Shouto's original estimation of his character. He was kind and easily flustered. Not used to compliments or someone touching him. He was adept in battle but didn't say so himself. He hinted at having a non-physical quirk, something essentially everyone in Class 1-A possessed.

In the aftermath of the battle training, Shouto noted the change in his demeanor as well. During the trial, when he'd been captured, Midoriya held himself with a cool sort of confidence, something that quickly disappeared once they finished.

Or rather, once Midoriya found his coherency.

Midoriya told Shouto he might be able to use his mother's ice with his cursed left side. That in itself made him rethink his perception of Midoriya.

He had been quick to pick up on his reluctance to use his father's fire, using it against him in the battle and trapped his offensive side, leaving his attacks limited. Shoji commented that he was amazingly agile, to dodge and evade all six of his limbs. He also used Shoji's enhancements against him with his own type of flash-bangs and odd smells.

When they returned to class after lunch, where he was jumped by the Hatsume girl, Midoriya stayed mostly to himself. After apologizing to Shoji for all the stuff he put his senses through, which Shoji waved off with a compliment on utilizing the counters for his quirk, he sat in the front, surrounded by classmates that he was friendly with, watching

and writing about the matches as they proceeded. Garbled speech reached his ears and curiosity made Shouto lean towards him and peer down at his notebook.

Analysis. It shouldn't have come as a surprise, given how skilled and attentive he was. All Might called on him and Yaoyorozu often to explain where and when someone faltered or could have done better.

All Might seemed familiar with Midoriya in some way. They were tense around each other, All Might becoming more of a nervous wreck with every interaction. Midoriya, on the other hand, regarded him with indifference if he addressed him directly at all, which is to say, he did it once and lost most of his elation when he did. Going back to his notebook, Midoriya's mumbling turned quiet, barely audible compared to before.

Before he had any time to pursue that train of thought, he looked up to see Midoriya fling himself around the corner of the building, wearing the same athletic uniform as him but wearing the long gloves of his hero costume.

"Todoroki," he gasped. "Let's get inside."

Midoriya was short. An obvious statement but, Shouto knew first hand that he could make himself appear larger than he was. He was a threat in a fight, a force to be reckoned with.

He stepped onto the mat, readying himself for a fight but Midoriya stepped on, looked him up and down, then shook his head. "We aren't going to start with fighting. First, you need to know how to fall without breaking your neck."

So that's what they did. Midoriya manhandled him gently, something he hadn't thought someone could do, and corrected his form. Most of it was embarrassing, some partial moves that Midoriya performed with him were especially bad but the green-eyed boy continued unfazed and Shouto followed in suit.

Then they heard doors opening. Midoriya's muscles tensed at the noise of footsteps, but didn't look as Aizawa and Yamada, their English teacher, entered the gym.

"I think we're done, Todoroki," Midoriya said softly, giving him a forced smile.

He knew the uneasy tension that filled the air, the uncomfortable

expression on his face, but Shouto also knew that whatever this was, it didn't concern him.

He bowed to Midoriya. "Thank you for the lesson. Goodbye."

Though the temptation to stay gripped him strongly, he walked away from Gym Gamma without a backward glance.

The air tasted sour, but Izuku blamed his nerves for wrecking his taste buds. His hair stood on end and something heavy surrounded both of the figures that stopped a few feet away from the mat.

Almost. Izuku was almost able to forget everything but teaching Todoroki. Ayumi's lessons were ingrained in how he moved, Mitsu's made into deep-rooted instinct.

Were they angry with him now? They expected him and he ditched them for Todoroki. Maybe, if Aizawa was furious enough, he would rescind his 'emergency fostering' and let Izuku go back to his old life.

"Hey, little listener, are you still there?"

Izuku flinched at the familiar voice, finally turning to see Aizawa and Present Mic, or Yamada, as they called him in class.

"I just want to go home," Izuku confessed quietly. "You don't have to do this."

"Yeah, kid, we do," Aizawa told him softly.

Yamada advanced, cautiously stepping onto the mat. "The Hatsumes put your stuff together, but we can stay in the apartment for a while, if you need to."

Izuku shook his head. That wasn't what he meant. Mei told them about Dagobah but apparently, she kept some of it to herself. He didn't want them to have access to such a private part of his life.

He hoped they didn't live too far from Dagobah. They were pro heroes but he might still be able to slip out and find his way.

In the car, Aizawa broke the strained silence. "You haven't been suppressing your quirk at all?"

Izuku shook his head.

“Those are some nice gloves you have on,” Yamada commented from the front seat. “We can go look at more later, if you want.”

Izuku signed a quick *thank you,* finding himself unable to speak.

Yamada beamed, glancing excitedly over to his husband. “Shou, he knows JSL!” He whisper-shouted.

Aizawa grunted in acknowledgment, approval lurking in his eyes.

Ayumi was mute and Izuku had been quick to pick up JSL during the many nights he stayed too late and the Hatsumes wouldn’t let him leave without a parent escort. He, of course, mentioned that they could just drive him to the apartment themselves but they said they didn’t like the idea of him being alone. This caused many sleepovers and eventually, he rarely saw the apartment unless he had to wash his clothes or the urge to scour his notebooks to review crept up on him.

“Hitoshi will certainly be pleased.” Yamada hummed cheerily. “Mac, too, she hates noise in general so I’m naturally the target of her fury.”

“Who?” He signed, glad that his teacher’s attention had turned back to him so he didn’t have to speak.

“Mac is one of our cats. Hitoshi is our son.” Their what? “He’s adopted, of course, and we love him. He’s in UA too, actually! The Gen Ed course, but he wants to get into the Hero course via the Sports Festival-“

“Hizashi,” Aizawa interrupted.

“Right, right. He’ll have the chance to tell you himself when we get there.”

The rest of the ride was Yamada chattering away, filling what would have been tense silence. Izuku was undeniably apprehensive about the whole ordeal that would take place, but he relaxed into his loud, joyful personality. It reminded him of Mitsu, without the cursing.

He kept it up until they reached the apartment’s door, gesturing for Izuku to open the door. He was very suddenly reminded of everything that had fallen away in Yamada’s talk of which cats would love him. Grabbing the doorknob, he twisted it and walked in, the air as empty and cold as the last time he was inside. But now it held something

else. Something *more.* Ayumi peeked around a corner, her face lighting up at the sight of him, and he tilted his head in wonder.

She was glowing. And not that she wasn't totally beaming at the sight of him, bustling over with a box in her hands, but she. She was *literally glowing.*

It was subtle, but in the dim lighting of light bulbs Izuku never bothered to replace, he could most definitely see the halo of brightness around her.

"Izuku, what's wrong?"

Mitsu, he guessed she'd come in when he was busy staring at her wife, walked over and cupped his face in her hands. Her golden eyes turned bronze as she activated her quirk. *"You're glowing,"* Izuku stared at Mitsu, then glanced back at his teachers. *"Why are you all glowing?"*

"Glowing?" Ayumi questioned after setting down her box.

"We're what?" Mitsu looked down at herself, then at everyone else. "Izu, you're seeing something we can't."

"They have different colors-" his hands stilled, before he turned to Aizawa, signing, *"Quirk. Quirk."*

He raised an eyebrow. "You think this is part of your quirk?"

"What else could it be?" Mitsu stared at Izuku in wonder, grinning. "Kid, what's my color?"

He focused on her outline. *"Dark orange."*

She thought about it, then shrugged with a dramatic sigh. "Of course it's dark orange, my childhood decisions are coming back to bite my ass."

Ayumi slapped her arm, rolling her eyes fondly. *"What's mine, Izuku?"*

"Bright green." She pumped her fists in the air, shooting him a blinding smile as her wife scoffed.

"'Course you got something vibrant, Yumi, you're an attention hog."

She snorted in response. *"Must I remind you of last year's family cookout?"*

Izuku laughed outright, but Mitsu sputtered in indignation. “Yumi! You fiend!”

Yamada caught his attention with a wave of his hand. “What’s mine?” he asked.

Izuku smiled. *“Yellow, like daffodils.”*

Aizawa chuckled and Yamada nodded, putting his hand to his chin in thought. “I like it!” He decided a moment later.

“Yours is red.” Izuku signed to Aizawa. *“Like your quirk but softer.”*

Before he got a response, Mei burst into the apartment, nearly knocking over Yamada when he jumped to the side to avoid being hit by the door.

“Zuku!” Her delighted eyes zoomed onto him with her quirk. “Mom just told me you arrived!”

“Where were you?”

Her gleeful attitude staggered at his signing but amped up even higher after the falter. “In the courtyard with my babies! Well, a few of yours too… but mostly mine!”

“Did you blow anything up yet?”

Mei gasped loudly, affronted by his betrayal. “Zuku , you wound me,” she said, putting her hand over her heart. “Of course I have.”

“Are Ms. Ito’s plants okay?”

Ayumi hid her grin behind a webbed hand, but Mitsu groaned, undoubtedly remembering Ms. Ito’s horrified face when she saw the charred remnants of her plants.

“Don’t bring that up!” She whined. Her pouting face brought a teasing smile to his.

The Hatsumes always made things better.

Shouta gave his thanks to the Hatsumes as they finished loading the car with Midoriya’s meager amount of belongings. Ayumi had signed

to him that half the clothing they'd found would have been too small for Midoriya to wear. She told him they were fit for a six year old at best and that her family would take care of donating them.

He wondered what Hitoshi was up to. They told him about Midoriya and that he was coming to live with them but it hadn't garnered much of a reaction. They took him in the same way they did with Midoriya. Drastically different circumstances, but with the same authority to thank for the quick transfer. Shouta kept most of what he knew about Midoriya's situation to himself, leaving the chance for Midoriya to open up and keep what Shouta knew of his experiences, and more, private until he wanted to tell them.

The development of his quirk was odd. The way Midoriya described it to Hizashi, who translated as Shouta drove, was that, in the dark, they had glowed. He couldn't see it as well in the light, in fact, he said it was barely visible, likely why he hadn't seen it during school. They would have to test it out later.

Midoriya has relaxed his stiff posture after Hizashi started rambling about their cats, and, thinking back to how boisterous the Hatsumes were, he'd bet Hizashi reminded him of at least one of them.

The tension came back. It crawled into the vehicle slowly as they drove closer, showing in how the boy leaned against the car door and curved his shoulders in. Hizashi kept up his chatter, managing to distract him again, but when they parked Midoriya's mood dropped instantly.

He helped them with the boxes but his eyes darted around with apprehension in them. He wanted badly to dispel it, to tell Midoriya that he had nothing to be frightened of, but his words would hold no ground. He had been alone for too long to believe the word of a man he met two days ago.

Once they entered, Hitoshi walked out in a hoodie and jeans, observing Midoriya as much as he observed him.

"Good to meet you, Freckles," Hitoshi said. "I'm Hitoshi. Grab your stuff, I'll show you your room." Hitoshi ordered lightly. Midoriya listened and Hitoshi took the rest of the boxes from Hizashi, raising an eyebrow when Shouta signed that it was all Midoriya had.

When they disappeared down the hall, Shouta leaned faced his husband and leaned into his warmth, so, *so* thankful to have him. Hizashi wrapped his arms around him and buried his face in Shouta's

hair.

Midoriya would need support, with what was coming, and they would raise hell to make sure he got it.

Izuku entered the room. No, actually he stopped on the threshold to stare at the room in wonder. It was decorated almost exactly like the one he slept in at the Hatsumes' house. Their guest room had practically become his bedroom. The furniture was arranged as similar as it could be in the room, considering its shape was different than the one at the Hatsumes'.

"Pops thought this would make you feel more at home," Hitoshi explained. "Er- Yamada."

Izuku set his boxes down, sitting on the bed and folding his legs underneath him.

"Am I going to get a name, or should I just keep calling you 'freckles'?" he asked awkwardly.

Izuku rushed to sign, *"Sorry! I forgot."* Ignoring the way Hitoshi faltered, Izuku continued. *"I'm Izuku."* He finger-spelled his name, offering a small smile.

"Izuku?" Hitoshi asked. Izuku nodded. "Alright, do you prefer me speaking out loud or would you be more comfortable with sign? My dads didn't tell me much about you."

"Both are good," Izuku assured before adding. *"I can talk, I just don't want to right now."*

"So you like cats?" Izuku eyed the lean cat slinking into the room from behind Hitoshi. Yamada said they only had one orange one and she was named Tora.

"If I didn't I don't think I'd be able to live here. Hana already hates my guts, mutual disgust would be the end of my life, I'm sure."

He smiled, if only slightly, as he sat down on the bed. Another cat darted into the room, one of the gray ones, and hit the other cat on its way to Izuku. It jumped into the bed and sat next to him, ignoring the annoyed hiss that sounded from her companion. This one was either

Hana or Smoothie.

Hitoshi scoffed, crossing his arms as he stared down the cat. It just started rubbing itself over Izuku. “Really, Hana? What’s Izuku got that I don’t?”

“I spend my time with a woman who has a fish mutation quirk,” Izuku explained, slowly offering his hand for her to sniff before petting her.

He huffed. “You should cherish that advantage. Watch,” he stuck his hand out towards them, and Hana hissed before he got too close, darting to Izuku’s other side. “See, she’s a hate-filled beast.”

Izuku laughed, and Hitoshi grinned like he won something.

The quiet kept him awake, in the end. At the Hatsumes’ house, there were snores and the whirl of machinery to tide him over but here, silence reigned. No light, no sound aside from the cats occasionally padding around. The smell of lavender lingered from Hitoshi’s prolonged stay. He lasted about an hour of simply staring at his ceiling before sitting up.

The desk sat empty, like the closet, and he had no desire to fill them. That would mean accepting that he would be staying here for a long time. He refused.

The night bled into early morning and he left the room. Cats bombarded him and twisted themselves around his ankles but he eventually made it to the kitchen and sat on a stool. The clock declared it 5:38 and a few minutes later, Hitoshi strode in, glowing purple in the darkness.

“Heard you get up. Did they take in another insomniac?” He said as he reached for the upper cabinets.

“It’s quiet here,” Izuku said, taking Hitoshi by surprise. “I’m used to ambient noises. Waves and stuff.”

“Oh, like from your phone?” Hitoshi guessed.

Izuku shook his head. “No, I used to sleep on a beach a lot.” He pulled out his phone from his pocket and slid it across the counter for him to see. “That salvaged thing can’t project sound, anyway, so it’s not like I

could even if I wanted to."

Carefully, as if picking up a baby, Hitoshi lifted his phone from the counter and examined it. "They told me you made support gear."

"I do." Izuku retorted defensively.

"Then why is this your phone? Can't you, I dunno, make a better one?"

"I guess," he admitted with a shrug. "I've just never had to try. Mei, my friend, says she hates it and that she's making me one for my birthday, so I think I'll just wait and see what she cooks up."

Hitoshi stopped making his coffee for a moment to stare at Izuku. "Hatsume Mei? *That* Mei?" Izuku nodded slowly. "Oh, wow, I'm not sure you want that phone when she gives it to you. Last I heard, she blew up half the Support Department."

He laughed, imagining her grin as she waltzed out of the smoke waving her wrench around, ideas pouring from her mouth. "Definitely *that* Mei."

"You like coffee or…?" He asked after a moment.

"I'll take some, please."

Sliding him a cup and sugar, Hitoshi poured himself a cup. "Do you know anyone that's likely to drop out of the Hero course?"

Izuku thought about his classmates and nodded. "Apparently we all have potential, according to Aizawa, but there is a boy who acts really pervy when it comes to the girls." Izuku made a displeased face. "His name's Mineta and I already threatened to dropkick him yesterday when he started making comments about the girls' costumes."

"Nice, then I won't have to feel bad about replacing him."

"Dealing with both of you in class is going to be a nightmare," Aizawa grunted, entering from the hallway.

"Thank you so much," Hitoshi smirked, raising his mug to his lips.

The rest of the morning was spent exchanging light conversation before they were told to get ready for school. Aizawa held him back, switching off the lights.

“Can you still see it?”

“Yes,” he paused. “Actually, I think it’s brighter now.”

“What do you think it means?” Aizawa said, turning the lights back on.

“I’m not sure,” Aizawa cut him a look, raising his eyebrow. “Fine, I have an empathetic quirk, right? Well, empaths deal with auras all the time, colorful or not. The colors obviously represent the person it surrounds and maybe the color will change with their mood? Or, since my quirk focuses on insecurities, maybe when they start to feel bad something will happen. I mean, I noticed that the air gets really heavy and tastes awful when people aren’t in a good mood-“

“Midoriya, the air? Explain.”

“Oh,” he said nervously. “When we were in the gym it was like something was rotting and I’m pretty sure it was me but since I can’t see my own aura, it might have been you or Yamada since nothing was up with Todoroki-“

“Thank you. Go get ready.”

The abrupt dismissal jarred him, but he listened. They all rode in the car, Aizawa and Yamada in their hero costumes. Yamada has his hair down, groaning about the time it took to gel. No one spared them a second glance and Hitoshi snickered, telling him that even though he was a popular hero, no one recognized Yamada as Present Mic with his hair down.

Hitoshi and Izuku parted from the heroes, walking on their own in an odd, but not necessarily uncomfortable silence.

“Thank you for being so hospitable.” Izuku rubbed his thumb nervously across the ratty fabric of his backpack. “I know you must not like me barging into your home-“

“You aren’t,”

“Huh?”

“Your arrival was sudden but you aren’t imposing.” Hitoshi caught Izuku’s eye, a steady reassuring gleam reflecting in the sun.

The moment shattered as the rumble of chatter rose ahead of them.

The press? What were they-

“Oh!” A reporter elbowed their way out of the crowd and approached them, shoving a microphone in Izuku’s face. “You’re students here, at UA. What do you think of All Might as a teacher?”

They were quickly swarmed. Izuku stumbled into Hitoshi’s side, panic rapidly setting in at the sight of so many people crowding them. Someone put their hand on his shoulder. He jerked away, suppressing the urge to grab their wrist and *throw* them. A voice spoke, their breath ghosting along the skin of his exposed neck.

Too close. Too close. Don’t touch me. Don’t touch me. Please leave. Get away. Don’t-

Someone grabbed his wrist and pulled. He tried to wrench himself out of their grip, hysteria and fear leaving him a mess of ragged breaths and blurry vision. The person held on, though. The noise stopped and the person sat him down somewhere.

“Izuku,” a familiar voice called. “You’re safe, no one is going to hurt you.”

But what if I hurt them? I’m dangerous. I can’t touch them. Don’t touch me. Don’t touch me-

“I won’t touch you, I promise. Just breathe with me, it’ll be okay.”

An exaggerated inhale from beside him registered, but barely.

Another; this time, he tries to imitate it.

Again.

Again.

In. Out. Steady.

“Toshi?” His slurred voice cracked under the pressure of his breaking dignity. He feels distant, yet there.

“Can I put my hand on your shoulder?”

After a moment of thought, Izuku nods. The warmth that placed itself onto him is grounding and a much welcome tug back into a more conscious reality.

In. Out.

“Are you back with me?”

“Yeah,” And *god,* does he hate the tremor he hears. Hitoshi shouldn’t have to be here, comforting him. “Sorry, I-”

“Had a panic attack?” He sighed, pressing his fingers into the back of Izuku’s hand, different to the previous touch, present, but not firm. “It’s not your fault reporters are such inconsiderate assholes.”

“I-” He starts, wanting to say something. He falls short, gazing up to Hitoshi’s lavender eyes already observing him carefully. The fingers on his hand don’t falter. “Thank you.” He settles on, unsure that, should he argue, he would make any progress.

“Be thankful that you still have two minutes before we’re late to class. Aizawa isn’t fond of tardiness.”

Oh. Shit. “Class,” he murmurs. “Class! I’m so sorry-”

“Don’t be.”

“-let’s go. I don’t know where your homeroom is, but I doubt you being late would be good either.”

“Iida would flambé me.” Izuku agreed, then hesitated. “Well, maybe not. But-”

“Izuku!” Hitoshi yelled, hurrying him.

“Right!” Izuku called, scrambling after him.

Chapter End Notes

Comments give me life y'all

Thanks for the support!

Attached Already? Figures

Chapter Notes

Izuku used Unwitting Compliment!

It is SUPER EFFECTIVE!

Warning: There is another panic attack, be safe

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He burst into the room, huffing slightly, and rushed to take his seat. UA was a massive building and Hitoshi had brought him the most familiar part of it to him. The General Education halls. They just so happened to be on the other side of the building. Izuku had to go through Support, where an explosion nearly flung a door in his face, closely followed by a yell that sounded suspiciously like *“Hatsume!”* but he didn’t have the time to ponder that. He skidded to a halt in front of the giant door and pushed into it heavily.

Iida was by his side from the moment he set foot beyond the threshold, chopping air and shouting in his ear, but Izuku only waved him off once he dropped into his desk. He felt tired. Drained.

“Midoriya! This is very unbecoming of you!” Izuku winced at the close proximity of his booming voice. “A proper attendance is mandatory for a striving hero such as-“

“Iida, the press is crowding the entrance, kero.” Asui intervened. “Most of us got hung up for a while when we had to get past them.”

“Quiet,” Aizawa’s monotone voice quelled the remaining noise in the classroom, all the students returning to their desks and sitting at attention. His eyes flicked to where Izuku rested his head in his palm.

“Today, you’ll pick class representatives.” Huh. Oddly normal. “Wake me up when you’ve elected them.”

Izuku put his head under his arms, relishing in the darkness, the cool feeling of the desk against his face. There were sensible people in the class, those guys would either take the spots or make sure other appropriate students took on the task.

Someone nudged him and slipped a piece of paper onto his desk.

There were names written, checkboxes beside them. Were they voting on a rep? He scanned the list and lazily slashed three boxes and wrote a note beside the final one. Someone took his paper and he relaxed onto the desk again.

His time of rest and forgotten woes was tragically torn from him, a hand of someone most cruel jostled him from his half-conscious state.

He smiled tiredly at Uraraka, who urged him to his feet with gentle hands.

“Meet the new class representative: Midoriya!” Izuku went stiff under the hand on his shoulder, straightening in alarm. “And our vice rep: Yaoyorozu!”

His classmates cheered. Izuku blinked in total bewilderment. “Wait, what?” He said weakly.

The bell rang and Aizawa emerged from his cocoon. “Good, you’ve chosen. Leave.”

“What?” Izuku tried again. How had *he* been elected? He slept through class for heaven’s sake! His eyes went to Yaoyorozu with some form of relief. Thank god she was with him, at least. He caught her in the hall, walking by her with his anxiety through the roof.

“Uh, Yaoyorozu?” He cleared his throat. “What happened? Why am I the class rep?”

She gave him an amused look. “It shouldn’t be a surprise that you were chosen, Midoriya.” She huffed with a smile. “While we missed you the first day, you more than proved yourself during All Might’s hero lesson. Then even more when you observed the remaining matches with such vigor.”

He sputtered, pink dusting his cheeks. “But I’m not fit for this position!” He insisted. “My fighting skills don’t play into how well I *lead.* It should be you or someone like Iida or Asui!”

“Asui?” Yaoyorozu says, sounding rather interested.

“Yeah, I mean, I’ve talked to her like, once in passing, but Tokoyami hangs around her and she’s pretty cool-headed, based on her hero course match-up. I don't know much about her, which is why I chose her after you and Iida, but she’s definitely sensible *and* a good fighter. Plus, she stopped Iida from yelling at me with sound reasoning, so I

think she could handle the class."

Yaoyorozu tilted her head, a fond expression crossing into her face as she stared at him.

"W-What?" He stuttered, finding himself much warmer than before as she just *kept looking at him.*

"Again, I have to say that you shouldn't be surprised by our trust." She paused, glancing at their classmates ahead of them, then back to him. "Why did you vote for me? We've barely spoken before now."

"You mean aside from the fact that you clearly have a head for strategy and act more responsible than half the class does? You made it into UA by recommendation, and you've certainly proved yourself to be impressive, during the Quirk Apprehension Test and the battle training. Your quirk, while versatile, would be extremely difficult to use if you weren't dedicated and intelligent enough to remember the chemical composition of whatever you decide to create. You possess a level-head and have more approachability than Iida when it comes down to it. You are kind and, while I do not know the depths of your character, I know enough to realize that you are a formidable ally, an adverse opponent, a compassionate friend, and a strong leader. Our classmates would be idiots to disregard you in any way. *I* certainly know that you are far better suited for the role I've been voted into."

At her silence, he quickly looked up to her. She had stopped walking, a stunned expression stuck on her face. Speaking of her face, it was beginning to become *very* pink. And her eyes were watering. Shit, what the hell did he do-

Alarms blared in his head, scolding him for whatever the hell he did to make her cry. "Yaoyorozu, I'm so sorry-"

But then she was hugging him. He stiffened at the contact, instinctively blocking his quirk when she wrapped her arms around him. It turned out to be a fortunate thing too; she grabbed his face when she pulled away from the hug.

"You may not believe you belong in your position, Midoriya, but I assure you, you are more than worthy of it."

His mood rose and fell like a rollercoaster. His heart swelled at the soothing words but his brain began blurring his thoughts from the hands that touched his bare skin. No one touched his face. It just didn't happen. The Hatsumes didn't grab him without warning, they

didn't touch him without letting him know what they were about to do.

Yaoyorozu removed her hands from his face.

"Are you alright?" Great, she was concerned now. Look at what you did, you flipped the mood from *Encouragement* to *Confusion/Panic.* Bravo.

"Y-Yeah," He answered, stepping away. "I ju-just don't l-like to be touched." Damn stuttering, making him sound like an idiot.

She gasped, taking a step away from him. "I am so sorry!" Yaoyorozu apologized frantically. "I shouldn't have grabbed you like that without your permission. And after you said such nice things about me, too!" She bowed low, much to his embarrassment.

"It's fine!" he squeaked, gesturing for her to stop. "Ju-Just don't touch my skin a-and I won't freak out." *I hope.* He didn't have experience with touch outside of the Hatsumes and they were a grabby bunch that constantly bombarded him with small gestures of physical affection. He liked them, there was no point in denying that, but he never allowed too much direct contact when he was around them. For example, Izuku dodged Mei's cheek kisses (which she tried as a joke, then began attempting to catch him off guard) like the plague. He let himself relax his control when he was around them, wearing concealing clothing and gloves.

It was a stark contrast to what he used to enjoy wearing.

"Ah, so is that part of your quirk?" Yaoyorozu questioned as they walked forward.

His hackles rose at the query but he knew his quirk would come up eventually. It's not like they wouldn't realize something was up when he continuously wore his gloves all the time. But knowing never helped him calm down.

Finding himself unable to speak, he nodded.

Thankfully, Yaoyorozu let the topic drop.

"I heard you thought I should have been considered as a class rep."

Izuku ‘eeped’, flinching back and slightly into where Kirishima sat beside him when Asui dropped into the seat on the other side of him. What Yaoyorozu did put his entire being into a state of perpetual panic, nevermind his earlier panic attack. They didn’t know about his quirk. They didn’t know that they couldn’t touch him without him having to suffer the consequences. Sure, he wore his gloves, but the phantom pressure of Yaoyorozu’s hands kept his nerves on edge.

Maybe I should tell them? The thought, while rational, only served to counteract any relaxing he had been able to do.

“Midoriya?”

“Huh?” His head shot up, finding Kirishima gazing down at him in a slight panic.

“Are you okay?” Uraraka chimed in, her concern alerting him to the fact that the rest of his classmates that sat at their table were also worried.

He nodded hastily. “Y-Yeah, I’m fine!” The wobble to his voice was damn near unnoticeable, *thank god,* but it stubbornly stayed in his voice. If he couldn’t get a grip Izuku would have to start worrying about not being able to speak *at all.* “Just e-extra jumpy today,” he said sheepishly.

“Are you sure, ribbit?” Asui croaked. “You’ve been pretty pale since homeroom.”

“Y-You had a question,” *Smooth transition.* “Or, it was a statement?”

There was a pregnant pause between his words and Asui’s. They all undoubtedly noticed his swift change of topic.

“Shoji told me that he overheard you and Yaoyorozu’s conversation after homeroom.” Asui tapped her forefinger against her chin, her cheeks dusted with pink. “He said that you recommended me for one of the spots.”

Izuku nodded, heat rising to his face. Right, Shoji had a surveillance quirk and walked a few meters ahead of them when they had that conversation.

“Can I ask why? We haven’t spoken that much.”

Why? Her presence itself was fucking *calming him down,* and after

what happened in her battle training match, calming someone down certainly wasn't her only skill. He tilted his head, slightly baffled. "We h-haven't spoken a lot, yeah, but I can tell you would fit the role nicely. I'm not sure if you actually have time or anything, but if I go off of what I've seen from you, then the vote was easy to make."

"'What you've seen'?" Asui prompted.

"You've got a level head, Asui. A calming presence and a mature aura to match. In your and Tokoyami's match against Bakugo and Iida, you collaborated well, and whether that should be attributed to the fact that you're a friendly person or not, it's an invaluable trait. Dark Shadow was a bad match for Bakugo's quirk and while he wasn't working together with Iida at all, his brute strength still could have overpowered him if you hadn't been with him. Tokoyami was flustered and Dark Shadow couldn't defend against Bakugo's assault. You stepped in and used your tongue to stop Bakugo from dealing what would have been a devastating blow in an ambush maneuver, flinging him against the wall.

"You didn't give him a chance to recover and use his gauntlets, smiling him into the wall again and swiftly using his disoriented state to allow you to get in close and capture him. When you finished, you made sure he was alright and then checked on Tokoyami. Your partner was slightly debilitated by Bakugo's quirk, Dark Shadow in worse shape from all the bursts of light, but you managed to calm him down and keep the two of you moving. When you reached Iida, he had removed any furniture for you to jump around on and moved the bomb behind a pillar for less of a visual. Tokoyami isn't familiar with too much combat, relying on Dark Shadow to fight for him, and Iida would be too fast for him to fight with his quirk still reeling from his earlier fight. You made the decision to go in first as a distraction. You are fast and can jump out of Iida's reach if he tried to capture you. Tokoyami entered when you fully distracted Iida, responding to a signal you made through the comms, and when Iida eventually noticed him slinking along the wall and halfway towards the bomb, you defended him long enough to allow Tokoyami to grab your team's victory.

"I personally don't see why you would find my faith in you surprising, considering all of that. To put it simply, you're reliable and calm, you work well with others, and you have the determination and kindness of a leader. A sound mind and quick thinking never hurt either, especially in a fight." Izuku rubbed the back of his neck, staring at his lap. "Also, you stopped Iida from yelling at me this morning, so that

was nice.”

Silence. Shit, did he say too much?

Immediately, he turned red. Fuck, what was he *thinking?* Why would they want to hear what *he* thought of them? Bakugo never liked hearing anything he had to say, whether it was praise or anything else, they wouldn’t be different. “I-I’m sorry!” He said, curling into himself. He wanted to disappear. They were being so nice to him and he- *fuck*- he went and rambled about their match. In front of Iida, too! *Creep. Stalker,* Bakugo’s voice jeered. *Worthless Deku, just shut up already*. “I- You must th-think I’m weird, I’ll shut up, I promise. You won’t have to listen to me talk.”

“Woah, where’d that come from?” Kirishima said. “Dude, you just gave her really sincere compliments, why’re you apologizing?”

“We don’t mind listening to you talk, either!” Uraraka said firmly. “Based on all the notes you take, I think we could all improve our techniques if you gave us pointers. Plus, you’re cute when you ramble!” He looked up sharply at that. *Cute?* No one ever called him cute. Ayumi and Mitsu did, but they were family. Uraraka abruptly became the color of Kirishima’s hair, breaking off into incoherent mutters.

“I don’t know why you would apologize, ribbit.” He looked back to Asui, who was smiling fondly at him. “Thank you for what you said, Midoriya. Oh, and call me Tsu.”

He opened his mouth to respond but an alarm interrupted him. He flinched at the loud blaring and, for a singular moment, no one moved.

Chaos ensued. Everyone stood and ran for the hallway, his friends included. They dragged him with them once they realized he wasn’t moving. He broke out of Kirishima’s grip and backed away from the exit, backed away from where he *knew* there would be a large crowd of panicking students. Kirishima looked back, attempting to grab him again but Izuku stumbled back, shaking his head vehemently.

He tried to speak, to communicate his fear, and why they *should absolutely not go into the hallway,* but Iida grabbed him and meshed him into the crowd of students.

His quirk immediately cowed when the bodies of his peers pressed into his. His entire body shrieked at the contact, his mind screeching

in alarm. He couldn't breathe. He had to get out. But he couldn't. They wouldn't let him. Pain flared in his scars, reminding him, kindly, that he was trapped like before. He couldn't fight the pressure that slammed him into the wall, not unlike how impossible it was to remove his arm from the crushing weight of the trash, metal digging into his arm.

Distantly, some part of him realized the bodies around him quieted. That someone shouted something and the crowd mentality became relief instead of fear.

Distantly.

Currently, he was trying to become one with the wall and just-

Hitoshi's voice, soothing and *there,* reminded him to breathe. Izuku tried to. He attempted to quell the overwhelming inability to process anything but the static buzzing in his ears. The fabric of his gloves felt coarse. Every brush of his uniform against his skin sent violent jolts of adrenaline rushing through him. The air smelled entirely too bitter.

Something within him writhed at his dismay, begging to be let go, pleading to be let out and protect him from the people *trapping him.*

Trapped. Trapped. He couldn't move. Pain pulsed in his left arm. Purple flashed in his hazy vision. Kurogiri? A dark green blur moved beside him. Mom? They- They would get him out. Right?

But Kurogiri said he was useless. Mom hates him.

They'll leave me here to die.

"Izuku, I need some kind of response, okay?"

He whimpered at the voice. It was too close. Too loud. … But it was familiar.

Peace unlike anything he had ever experienced washed over him. *"Breathe."* Izuku did as he was told, inhaling and exhaling shakily.

"Good, that's good." The voice said. Then, with something menacing and protective lacing his tone, *"Who the hell* put him in the fucking mob of students?"

Someone else answered but Izuku didn't want to hear their conversation. Every sound thundered inside his head, ricocheting

against his skull and pounding at his brain.

His vision cleared, if only somewhat. Enough so that he could make out Tsu sitting patiently in front of him, Hitoshi at her side, and a few others nearby. *Not Mom.* He shoved disappointment down. Midoriya Inko was *not* his mother. He shouldn't want her anywhere near him.

And yet, he still clung to the barely-there memories of her laughing and holding him close to her. He wanted so badly to hate her, but Izuku had lived off of her memory for too long. Sustained himself with the almost forgotten smile that graced her face whenever he ran into her arms. Inko didn't want him, but he desperately needed his mother.

Finding Izuku in the middle of a panic attack had not been what Hitoshi expected, but he was more surprised by the fact that Izuku went into the crowd at all when he knew he had such a terrible reaction to big groups of people. Then some Hero student with red hair ran up to them and Hitoshi glared at him, ordering him and the other students to keep their distance. Guilt crossed their faces and it clicked.

Rage that he didn't have time for erupted within him. They forced Izuku into the crowd.

As soon as Izuku was under the control of his quirk, he rounded on the Hero course students. One of them was the kid who stopped all the panic, there was a brown-haired girl, a green-haired girl, and the one with sharp teeth. *"Who the hell* put him in the fucking mob of students?"

They cringed at his angered tone. Good.

"I-If we'd known that he would react this badly, we never would have-"

Hitoshi scowled. "I *really* doubt he didn't put up a fight." Glasses and Sharp-teeth winced. "You forced him into a highly stressful environment for him, ignoring his protests, and triggered a panic attack."

"The alarm-"

"You're lucky he wasn't *trampled."* He bit out. "You're lucky the

situation ended as fast as you made it because otherwise, he would have just had to sit there, *alone,* and deal with this by himself until he passed out from not *fucking* breathing."

At the tug on his sleeve, he turned to look down at the green-haired girl. "I think Midoriya's calm enough for you to stop using your quirk." *Midoriya was his surname? Fitting.*

He turned to Izuku, glad to see that she was right, then slid his gaze back to Izuku's classmates. "Stay back. Do *not* crowd him." Greenie backed off. Huh. At least she and the other girl were sensible.

He released his hold on Izuku slowly. His quirk left the mind foggy and if he was having some kind of sensory overload it wouldn't do him any good to be thrust back into the extent of all his senses. When he fully let go, he sighed in relief when Izuku didn't immediately begin hyperventilating again. "Izuku?" He murmured, leaning in but not breaching the space they had given him. "Can you hear me?"

He nodded but curled tighter into the ball his body formed against the wall.

"Can you speak?" Izuku paused, then shook his head. Hitoshi pursed his lips. "Do you have the energy to sign?" Again, he hesitated, this time lifting shaky hands out of his lap.

"A little bit." It was trembling and nearly unintelligible, but something in his chest loosened.

"Would you like me to sign to you, too?" Hitoshi had seen his reactions to his classmates' argument with him. He might not be comfortable with too much noise. Izuku squinted at him, then shook his head. *Damnit,* he cursed. If he couldn't concentrate enough to read signs, that definitely raised another red flag.

"Okay, I'm going to move closer to you, is that fine with you?" He sent a glance towards the unspeaking students, wordlessly ordering them to stay quiet and unintimidating. *Lord help them if they don't.* When Izuku let him know it was indeed fine, Hitoshi scooted over to the wall and leaned against it beside him, making sure he was close enough for Izuku to *know* he had someone beside him.

"Do you think you can stand?" Hitoshi shifted, showing his movements to Izuku so that he didn't startle. "I can find headphones so that you have white noise. Beach waves or anything-"

"Beach," Izuku said simply. Hitoshi moved and held his hand out for him to take if he wanted to. They stood together, Izuku on shaking legs.

"I can give him my headphones," Greenie offered in a low voice. And *thank god* she did. Hitoshi had seriously been considering straight-up stealing one of their headphone sets if no one had the decency to do it. "They're in my bag and it's not that far."

"We'll be in Aizawa's classroom." Choosing to ignore their blatant shock, Hitoshi guided Izuku down the halls until his body caved on him. Hitoshi held him up, not liking the faint whine that Izuku made when he was taken off the ground. The bell rang and he winced as Izuku shuddered and pressed into him as students filed out of their classes and into the hallway. Hopefully, his dad would clear up his absence and no one would scold him for ditching.

Because, well- he looked down at Izuku, who gripped his uniform in a vice grip, clinging to him like he was a lifeline- Hitoshi thought he had an adequate excuse.

Shouta's class emptied out and Hitoshi walked in, gently pulling Izuku in with him. His dad sat straight up in his sleeping bag, glaring death until he took stock of the fact that they must look like they are worse for wear.

Shouta shimmied out of that stupid birthday present Hitoshi had given him over a year ago. It had been a goddamn gag gift because Aizawa Shouta could sleep *anywhere.* But no. He used that obnoxious thing every day.

"What's wrong?" he asked, eyes scanning each of them before settling on Izuku.

"When we got to school, reporters mobbed us and Izuku had a panic attack. I calmed him down fairly quickly, but it probably left him on edge." Shouta's expression soured immediately. *Give 'em hell, Dad.* "Then the alarm went off and he tried to stay in the cafeteria because obviously he and crowds don't mix, but a couple of your students pulled him into the hallway despite Izuku trying to stop them and triggered another, much worse attack that went on for at least five minutes."

His eyes narrowed dangerously. "Who?"

"I don't have names," Hitoshi admitted sheepishly. "But the two that

forced him into the crowd had glasses, blue hair, sharp teeth, and red hair. I don't have the full story, but they don't look too hot from where I'm standing."

"I'll speak with them later." He looked back down to where Izuku practically collapsed against Hitoshi. "For now, we should let him rest."

"Another one of your students, a girl with green hair and uh, I don't know, a neutral expression, she's bringing headphones for Izuku."

As if waiting for her cue, Greenie knocked lightly on the door before stepping into the room, holding out a pair of headphones. He nodded in thanks before awkwardly situating them on the floor, Izuku attempting not to be a dead weight in his arms and managing to hold himself up long enough for Hitoshi to put Greenie's headphones onto his head, the sound of beach waves playing through his phone.

Izuku melted against the wall, his breath finally not sounding so strained.

"You said he was in a big crowd of students?" Shouta said suddenly, coming to sit in front of them.

"Yeah, the whole hallway was full and everyone in it was being squished between someone else. The whole thing was madness."

He cursed, making Hitoshi raise an eyebrow. "His quirk," Shouta began. "He has gloves but it activates without him needing to consciously call on it. It requires skin on skin contact and should have no off switch."

"Should have?"

"Someone, we're not sure who, maybe several people, told him to never use his quirk when he was younger. While most people who have negative reactions to their quirks simply never use them, he actively pushed it away and stopped his body from using it."

Now it was his turn to curse. "Shit, that's bad."

"I won't tell you what it does, that's Midiriya's business, but he's adverse to touch and it's instinctive for him to suppress his quirk at this point, I think." he sighed heavily. "I told him to stop doing that, his gloves and uniform easily protect him from direct physical contact but if it was as crowded as you say, I doubt he would have left

anything to chance.”

“I’m just glad I found him,” Hitoshi said as Izuku leaned into his side. “I don’t like the thought that he might have been alone or with someone who might only make things worse.”

“You did well, Hitoshi,” Shouta promised him. “Don’t waste time thinking about what could have happened. He’s here with us now, safe, and we’re going to make sure he knows it.”

Hitoshi glanced down at the tuft of green curls, at Izuku who fell asleep against him. Glasses and Teeth flashed in his mind, their eyes shining with guilt. He looked back up at his dad, who stared at him with an intensity he matched. “Agreed.”

Chapter End Notes

> Big bro Hitoshi can and will screw someone up if they do something to Izuku (though several of his classmates would too at this point)
>
> Thank you for your comments and kudos! I really appreciate them!!

Inevitable collision

Chapter Notes

USJ!!!! The reunion is here!

And? 10,000 hits?? Guys?? Thank you so much!!!

Edit: 2/12/2021

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Raki-”

Tomura shushed him, the light clicking noises continuing as he focussed on the small screen. “Hold on, I’ve almost beat him,” he insisted, not noticing that the durability of his weapon was decreasing each time it made contact with the beast’s scaly skin as his gloved partially gloved fingers tapped furiously.

“Wait, but your sword-” He cut off as the screen displayed Tomura’s avatar whacked at the mini-boss for the final time. The weapon exploded into shards dramatically and the beast mauled his avatar. The graphics, though terrible, were made up for by the rather amusing theme music that played in response to his death.

“Now, I’ll have to find all those materials again!” Tomura shrieked, enraged. “And the enchantments! Those damn enchantments!”

Izuku frowned. “Hey, it’s okay-” He reached out without thought and repressed a flinch when Tomura threw his arm out to push him away. “Raki, please.” Hesitantly, he sat beside Tomura as he fumed.

Picking up the discarded gaming device, he rifled through his inventory. “You have some of the materials already,” he commented, laying back on the bed and pulling his friend down with him. “The main thingamajigs aren’t even that hard to get with your other weapon, right?” Leaning into Tomura’s side, he showed the screen to his friend. “And you wanted to find a pet didn’t you?”

Tomura took the device out of his hands and tossed it to the end of the bed. Izuku blinked at the action with mounting confusion. Reaching out to grab it, he yelped when an arm snaked around his waist and yanked him back

into Tomura. Wiggling, he giggled as Tomura grumbled into his fluffy hair.

“Wanna hug?” he asked, as though they weren’t already pressed together.

Tomura grunted in agreement, loosening his arms to let Izuku flip onto his other side. His hand brushed along his stomach and Izuku let out a loud giggle.

“What was that?” Tomura asked, repeating the motion and garnering the same response.

“S-Stop!” Izuku laughed, squirming. “Th-That tickles!”

He ignored his squeals, a smile replacing the rage from before. “Will you do this every time I ‘tickle’ you?”

Izuku nodded, burying his blushing face in his shoulder as Tomura held him in place and tickled him.

He panted and clutched his friend’s shirt, left reeling once the torment ceased. “Raki…” he whined tiredly. His eyelids drooped as the high of emotions drained away.

“You have a nice laugh,” Tomura murmured softly into his hair, pulling Izuku closer as he fell asleep.

Izuku blinked awake, and stared at the wall blankly, eyes empty as the phantom sensation of Tomura’s hands faded back into his memories. Desks sat neatly in front of him, the comforting sound of waves filtering in as he fully regained consciousness.

Desks? Why were there desks-

Remembering everything, Izuku jolted violently and threw himself off of the ground and onto his unsteady legs. Something on his head ripped away, jerking him backward, and the waves were gone. He stumbled back and hissed when something dug into his back. Vision swimming from the pain jutting through every corner of his brain, he ducked his head and put his hands over his temples in an attempt to quell the incessant throbbing.

“-ku? Hey, look at me.”

Head snapping up, Izuku met Hitoshi’s eyes. His gaze became fogged,

the previous movement too sudden. His whole body shuddered in pain, a pitiful noise crawling out of his throat when another jab of pain sliced into his brain. Panting, he clamped down on the source of the pain.

The proverbial action felt like holding a fish in his bare hands as he tried to shove it into a box. Twisting and thrashing, he slammed the opening shut, the “fish” within it, and his pain faded away.

“Are you okay?” He jolted at the sound of Aizawa’s voice, then relaxed.

“I- Yeah,” He breathed deeply, relishing in the ability to shrug without intangible crows pecking out his brain. “I made it go away.”

Immediately, Aizawa and Hitoshi stiffened.

“Midoriya,” Aizawa began. “You made your quirk go away?”

Izuku looked up in confusion. Hadn’t he just said-

Right, he *wasn’t* supposed to lock away his quirk. He looked away, ears burning, and bit the side of his cheek.

“Do I have to let it out?” God, he sounded like a child.

“Yes,” they answered at once. Aizawa continued firmly. “The longer you wait, the worse it will get.”

“You- You saw how I was, right? I could barely move,” He chuckled weakly, hugging himself. “We’re in homeroom. Teachers need room to teach.”

“The infirmary?” Hitoshi offered. “I don’t think Recovery Girl will put up an argument.”

And that’s how Izuku ended up on an infirmary bed, regretting every choice that led him to this moment. Aizawa and Recovery Girl stared at him expectantly while Hitoshi simply faced him from his bedside.

“You’re sure I gotta do this?” he checked, just in case.

“Yes,” they all answered.

Izuku made a disgruntled noise and resigned himself to his fate. He laid back against the bed and closed his eyes, focussing on the imagined opening. “Heads up,” he warned, an inkling of what was

about to hit him trickling through a gap in the box as he readied himself to open it. “I might pass out.”

The moment of peace that occurred in the split second after he ripped open the box would be forgotten, but he took solace in the brief moment of time before agony washed over him. Any notion of the world around him was swiftly done away with as his entire body tensed and convulsed. He choked on a gasp and-

God, why didn’t he stay asleep? He groaned, muscles twitching with oversensitivity. “Fuckin’ quirk,” he hissed, slurring the words terribly with his tongue of lead.

“Recovery Girl’s got you hopped up on some pain medication but I guess biology is doin’ you in, huh?”

Izuku turned his head slowly, squinting at a figure by his side. “Yer so…” he raised a hand and waved it at Hitoshi. “Purple. Heh, and you know who you remind me of?” His mouth stretched into a smile and he moved his hands to his hair. “You remind me of Kurogiri! He was always so nice to me, you know?” He paused, frowning. “Until the end.” He left. Kurogiri left him. “Why did he leave?”

He pulled his hands away. “He said he’d stay. He *promised* me. Why did he-” Izuku blinked, a foreign feeling becoming apparent. He looked at his hands.

Aizawa stood and stalked over from the other side of the room. “Whatever he told you-”

“He promised me it wasn’t bad,” Izuku whispered, cutting him off. “He *promised.* But when I used it, he-” Why was it out? Why had he let that thing out? He could feel it in his skin, he could feel it surging through him. “Why did I let it out? Why is it out? This is wrong. It- It needs to go back-”

“Hey!” Aizawa snapped his fingers in front of his face, his expression serious. “Listen to me, Midoriya. Your quirk is not bad. It’s not wrong to use it.”

Izuku laughed, eyes distant. “They said that, too,” he mused. Gaze snapping to meet the Aizawa’s, he glared, his eyes a burning copse of distrust. “Then they saw it, and I was *worthless* to them,” he spat, tears welling in his eyes.

“I’m not stupid,” he continued, voice breaking. “But I *was* and I thought-” He forced out a sharp laugh. “I was so stupid. I’m not doing that again. I can’t.”

“Your quirk isn’t the problem, Izuku,” the Hitoshi soothed. “People are prejudiced assholes.”

“But Raki could turn things into fucking dust,” he argued. “Dust. Anything. He was useful.”

“People also don’t like it when their heads are messed with,” Aizawa added. Hitoshi stiffened, gaze flicking between the two of them. “And you don’t have to be useful to be worth something. You matter beyond what you can do for other people.”

“You’re so nice, you know?” Izuku said dopily after a moment.

“Isn’t he?” Hitoshi agreed.

“Hey, I’m the president, right?” Izuku asked blearily.

Aizawa blinked at the sudden change in topic but Hitoshi merely laughed. “Are you the-” he paused. “Actually, you are the president, Midoriya.”

Hitoshi’s snickering stopped. “Wait, what?”

“I don’t wanna be prez,” he whined. “I’m too much of a mess to be in charge of anyone.”

“That’s fair,” Aizawa conceded. “Who would replace you?”

Izuku made a pfft sound, as if the answer was obvious. “Yaoya- yowr-zu,” he stated falteringly. “And Asui can be her deputy!”

“These are sound decisions.” Aizawa nodded. He paused, hesitating before speaking again. “Midoriya, who were the people you spoke of? Kurogiri and Raki?”

Izuku pulled something out of his pocket, turning it over in his hand. The miniature soldier with flecked paint looked tiny in his hands compared to when he first received it. “I dunno, really.” He shrugged, not looking at either of them. “But for a while, they saved me.”

“What do you mean, ‘saved you’?” Aizawa prodded.

He turned over his pockmarked arm, examining the long healed

lacerations. “With Mom gone, I wasn’t gonna make it much longer. They helped me.” His expression soured. “And then they put me back.”

Aizawa didn’t ask him anything else about his past.

“You- You can’t just *take* all my journals!” Izuku argued, standing in front of the accumulated stacks of notebooks. Cemetoss and Snipe politely ignored his indigent shouts from the other side of the lounge.

“I have seen the interior content, we can’t have those things just lying around,” Aizawa said. Nodding at the stacks. “If you’d like to code them, we can see if Nedzu would be willing to let you learn one of his convoluted ciphers. It’s that or they burn.”

He bristled, glowering at his teacher. “I made one of these when I was six,” Izuku snatched a neon striped notebook off the top of a pile and waved it in front of him. “How is this, or any of them that I did before the age of thirteen, worth burning?”

Midnight stood from her seat on one of the couches, eyes bright. “Actually!” She piped. “Your notebooks helped give a lot of us pros at UA perspective. Of course, we are kinda worried about what this info could do to us if it got into the wrong hands.”

“We were very pleased with the amount of information on villains you also presented in your notes, too.” Vlad King added, raising his mug in a toasting motion. “But Aizawa is right. Code would be the safest option for everyone.”

They read them? All of them read his journals? They read their own entries and- and they thought his analysis was good? Every part of his body ought to have shut down for the kind of mush his brain gave him instead of thoughts. But… they wanted to burn his notebooks.

Those battered, torn books were so much of his life. They preceded Tomura and Kurogiri, they came before Mom left or Bakugo decided he wasn’t worthwhile. Hero Analysis for the Future was a part of him now and he sure as hell wasn’t going to let them turn all of that to ashes.

But they could go over his head and do it anyway if they wanted to. They could take years of his life and the memories scribed into the

pages and he wouldn't be able to stop them. Izuku understood the dangers of having a hero's information out in public for anyone to use, he really, really did.

The threat still stung.

"We would also like to visit the idea of offering your analysis to pro heroes outside of UA," Aizawa informed him flatly, like he wasn't saying something that made Izuku's heart want to beat out of his chest. "Plenty of pro heroes- actually, *all* the pro heroes you wrote about would benefit from your critizations."

"I may have mentioned to one of my sidekicks how absolutely ruthless you are with everyone and now, thanks to gossip, they have been requested by some heroes." Thirteen chimed in. "I for one, would love to see Endeavor's face if he ever reads his entry."

Several teachers' faces went through various types of emotions. "Amen, Thirteen." Midnight said, fist-bumping them.

"Wait, really?" Izuku said suddenly. Thirteen nodded and Izuku stifled a shout of glee. Heroes wanted to read his notebooks. Real pro heroes. He glanced back at the fourteen notebooks and blinked. Some of his entries were so disorganized and messy, the thought of showing that to anyone made him want to hide in a hole forever. "I'll code them," he said easily, snatching them off of the counter and whisking past all of his teachers.

If he truly intended to rewrite all of his entries, he would need more paper, Izuku realized as he sped down the hallways Should he just get more notebooks? Izuku already wrote in a code Mei made to conceal details of her inventions, so he should ask Aizawa if he can just write in that.

Cool, an excuse to visit Mei!

"I am never letting you near her again unsupervised," Aizawa grumbled, patting a scorched portion of his forearm.

Ignoring that regrettable statement, Hitoshi turned to Izuku. "What do you make, anyway? All I've seen is your trash phone."

Izuku stifled an offended noise and fiddled with his gloves. Was his

phone that terrible? It wasn't like he needed anything better, not that he could afford anything more than what he built. Sure, it was technically an *actual* trash phone, but Hitoshi didn't have to say it like that.

"Sorry," Hitoshi muttered, and Izuku realized he had started to press himself against the car door. "Your phone is fine, Izuku. It's definitely better than anything I could build."

"I made a gun," Izuku said monotonically, still averting his eyes. "And some- hover shoes? Heelys? They're shoes with tech." He never really made names for his inventions because they were so basic in nature. "They're nothing special, but they'll help me out when I need them."

He didn't look up to see Hitoshi's bemused and bewildered gaze turn to him, nor Aizawa and Yamada's shared look when he downplayed his work.

"So, is this gun just… a gun? Or did you bedazzle it?"

Izuku snorted, his shoulders shaking as he finally raised his gaze to meet Hitoshi's. "Yeah, it's real shiny," he said with a half-grin. "Gonna blind my enemies, then *wham,* I'll kick them with my light-up Skechers."

"To think, I doubted your ingenuity," Hitoshi said flatly, his lips quirked in a smile. "But, for real, what do they do?"

Izuku explained his inventions, accidentally going on a tangent about how he barely understood the chemistry he figured out that allowed him to use Stick and Explosion without blowing up both himself and Dagobah. When it happened, he didn't exactly have a science lab and the whole thing was an accident that tragically stuck together many parts that would have earned him a pretty penny. Not one to let such a travesty happen, Izuku figured out what went wrong and created a way to reverse the chemical reaction.

Hitoshi stared at him for a few seconds when he stopped talking. "To recap: You accidentally made an adhesive substance that has yet to be broken out of by anyone and engineered a way to make it obsolete, all so that you could sell scrap metal?"

Izuku stiffened at the amused tone of his voice. "Be glad I did, or I never would have made it here."

All of his companions paused at that.

“What do you mean?” Aizawa asked daringly.

“Tuition’s a steep thing to pay when you’re your only source of income,” Izuku stated quietly. The car was silent, the others paying him their full attention. “Why do you think I got a ‘trash’ phone?” he said self-deprecatingly.

“Shit, I’m sorry,” Hitoshi winced. “I shouldn’t have said that.”

“To be fair, it *is* made of trash, so you’re not wrong.”

“Wait, really?” Hitoshi asked incredulously. “Actual trash?”

Izuku flashed him a grin. “Straight from the beach,” he said proudly. “I also made a radio, which is my pride and joy.”

“But what about your nerf gun?” Hitoshi asked.

“That glorified multi-pen doesn’t play his radio show,” Izuku said easily, gesturing at Yamada. “Or anything, but you get it.”

Yamada gasped, twisting in the passenger seat to get a better look at Izuku. “You listen to my show!” he exclaimed.

“I do,” Izuku confirmed. “It’s specifically why I made a fully functioning radio.”

Yamada’s squeal of excitement put cracks in the windshield before Aizawa cancelled his quirk.

Where did they find this kid? He sleeps on a beach on occasion, knows just enough chemistry to not die, builds electronics out of trash, and has a tragic backstory. His eyes shined when he trailed off into a tangent about frequencies and rust, and he looked *adorable*.

The change was so drastic from earlier in the day. His hands were moving animatedly, not shaking and gripped around his uniform like a vice, and Hitoshi found he preferred this much more to the panic.

They arrived at the house in a flurry of movement, each of the cats coming to the entryway to greet them in their own ways. Tora, being the affectionate puddle of purrs that she was, ran up to them immediately and began rubbing against them, aka trying to trip them into falling into the floor and into the other cats. Hana glanced over

from the counter and then diverted her attention elsewhere with obvious distaste. Smoothie waltzed out from the hallway and *actually* tripped Izuku, forcing Hitoshi to hastily steady him. Mac and Cheese, however, kept their distance, peering out from the end of the hallway before slinking away.

Izuku gasped and unslung his backpack from his shoulder, kneeling down to rifle through the yellow bag. The remaining cats swarmed him, and he made a delightful sound before pulling odd-looking headphones out of the bag with a quick, “Ta-da!” He fiddled with something on the sides and smiled. “These are headphones for white noise, so don’t worry about getting me any.”

Hitoshi glanced at his dads, then back at Izuku, who gently nudged Smoothie to stop her from eating his backpack strap. “I thought you were reviewing code?”

“I can multitask,” Izuku said defensively. “Plus, with MeiMei already working, I didn’t have to do too much to find the right materials.”

“Are those also made of trash?” Dad asked bluntly. Izuku’s silence was very telling. “It doesn’t cost much to buy good headphones, Midoriya.”

Izuku looked away, then tapped the headphones again. “Too late, I made them, so it’d be a waste to buy other ones,” he argued. “And everything I make is made from scrap metal other people threw away, it’s free and a decent source of materials.”

“Does it connect to your phone somehow?” Pops asked, bringing the conversation back on course.

“Nope, my phone doesn’t make noise,” Pops looked personally offended at the idea, but Izuku didn’t look up. “This has a slot for a recording of what I want to hear. All I need to do is put the recording in and I can listen to anything.”

“You’re unbelievable,” Hitoshi commented, earning a wry smile from him.

“I try,”

Iida’s forlorn expression when he realized the bus-seat arrangement

was completely different from his expectations forced Izuku to fight down a smile. Yaoyorozu had taken her place as Class Rep. and Tsuyu had gracefully accepted her offer to be the Vice Rep., but they let Iida try to organize the class for them, even if the effort ended up being futile.

Izuku ended up sitting between Kirishima and Tsuyu on one of the center-facing columns of seats. Uraraka consoled Iida across from them, biting down her own smile.

“Are you guys excited for anything in particular?” Kirishima asked.

Tsuyu nodded. “There’s a water zone somewhere inside, ribbit. I’ll get to show off in my element.”

Kirishima grinned. “Alright, that’ll be really cool, Asui!” he complimented. His smile faltered slightly as he showed off his hand hardening. “My quirk isn’t that great to show off or do anything flashy with.”

Izuku perked up at the mention of quirks. “I guess, but that doesn’t mean it isn’t useful,” he said. “Quirks don’t make a hero and they definitely aren’t everything. There are tons of heroes with flashy quirks and trash personalities.”

“What, like Bakugo?” Kaminari cut in, smiling widely when Bakugo began snarling and yelling.

“Not necessarily,” Izuku apprised, dutifully ignoring the instinct to flinch when Bakugo turned his ire towards Izuku. “He has a good head on his shoulders to back up his brute force.”

“Shuddup, Deku!” Bakugo growled. “I don’t need your fucking help!”

“Chill, man,” Sero said placatingly. “He was giving you a compliment.”

Uraraka brightened suddenly. “Is ‘Deku’ a play on your name’s kanji?” she burst, smiling when he nodded. “I get it, it’s like ‘dekiru’! You can do it!”

No, Izuku thought as something warm bloomed in his chest. *No, but thank you, Uraraka.*

“Would you mind if I called you that?” Her voice brought him back into focus. The thought of someone calling him Deku made his mood

dampen, but this was Uraraka. She didn't want to use it to call him weak and useless. To her, the name was a drop of inspiration, not something that was used to tear him down for years.

"I don't mind," Izuku found himself saying.

"Yeah," Uraraka cheered. "Nice to meetcha, Dekiru!"

He stilled at the unexpected name, expecting to hear 'Deku', but didn't correct her. A pleasant feeling encompassed him for the rest of the ride, his classmates' voices filtering through his brain, some of them following Uraraka's lead when they wanted to get his attention and saying "Dekiru!". The absurdity of the events made him itch to laugh. Bakugo was being teased while people conversed easily with him when they wanted to.

Things were, so, so different, and Izuku couldn't have hoped for something better than this feeling of belonging.

Thirteen's speech resonated with Izuku on a deep level. Quirks, as useful and fantastic as they are, can deal a great amount of harm. Long faded scars from days that Bakugo felt especially wrathful twinged in reminder of what minimal quirk usage could do to someone. Then there was his mother, with a seemingly innocent quirk that could pull anything from a remote to another person's organs.

Izuku glanced at the center of the USJ, squinting as a mesh of color spawned in the air, growing mass steadily until he had to look away. The stench reached him and he took a step back without thinking. Something big was coming. People were going to enter the USJ, and he didn't think they were the friendly sort.

Catching Aizawa's gaze, he began signing, hoping that Thirteen could understand too. *"People are coming in, is this planned?"*

His eyes widened and Izuku wished his instincts had been wrong.

"Alright!" Thirteen clapped their hands together, their voice sounding strained. Izuku noticed Koda and a couple of the other kids moving with more urgency than the others. "Kids, I have something to show you outside, come with me please." Groans came from his classmates, but Thirteen straightened. "Move it, *now-"*

The light in the plaza erupted into a sun, making Izuku's vision white out as he pulled up his respirator to avoid the concentrated stench of their new guests. He blinked rapidly, his classmates' voices sounding increasingly concerned, and pulled down his goggles to shield his eyes before turning back to the-

Kurogiri?

Izuku stared at the purple mass that the villains entered through, his brain slowly processing what he saw as someone pulled him back by his arm. He snapped back into reality when Aizawa jumped into the crowd, fighting to give them time to escape-

Kurogiri appeared in front of his classmates, in front of him, and said, "My name is Kurogiri and we are the League of Villains." The rest of his speech was lost, Izuku's brain kicking into overdrive, scrambling to ravage his memory for any weaknesses that the warper had.

"Aim for his metal collar!" Izuku shouted, interrupting Kurogiri. "Hitting him anywhere else won't work."

Kurogiri's gaze narrowed on him, but he obviously didn't recognize him. "Well, aren't you a troublesome golden egg? What a hassle." he groused.

Without warning, the ground vanished beneath him.

Shouta had to buy them time. He had to concentrate. These thugs weren't even that skilled, but there were so many of them. They rushed him sporadically, rarely giving him a moment to breathe. The minor upgrades to his goggles were everything to him right now, brief bursts of mist allowing him to keep their quirks at bay for longer periods of time.

In front of him, where the two other ringleaders still stood, another portal opened.

Midoriya pushed himself to his feet, dazed from the fall, and tugged off his goggles. The villain with hands clutching his body stepped forward, and Shouta viciously threw the poorly skilled villains out of his way. Why was Midoriya here instead of with Thirteen? Where was the rest of his class if Midoriya had been dropped down here?

Protective rage made pummeling his way through the crowd of villains more of a haze. He glanced away from the fight to see the villain take off his face-hand and see Midoriya's expression morph into pure disbelief. Strangely, his body relaxed, but Shouta didn't have time to ponder Midoriya's reactions when his reflexes were growing sluggish. His mind howled *move move move,* but his body struggled to respond to the commands.

In the back of his head, Hizashi's voice replaced the flurry of thoughts barreling through his head. *"You can do it, Shou,"* he said earnestly. *"Fight."*

He was not All Might by any means. Shouta did not smile to provide comfort to anyone but his family.

No, the feral grin he bared at the villains was a warning.

Denki was so against being dropped into a lake. Like, *so* against it. The shouts of his classmates let him know not to use his quirk. If he let loose while they were all submerged, they would all suffer the consequences. So when a shark-headed villain interrupted his panicking, he flailed in the water, useless and he knew that he wouldn't be able to outswim his enemy. Lack of air blackened the edges of his vision, distant booms reaching his ears sluggishly through the freezing water.

The shark-man outstretched an arm but someone intercepted him. Asui. Thank jesus. Her tongue wrapped around his middle and before he knew it, he was being thrown into the air. He gasped, grateful for the air, only to realize he still had to fall. He braced to hit the ship he caught in his peripheral vision but someone met him halfway and caught him in the air.

Bakugo dropped him abruptly onto the deck from the bridal style carry he caught Denki in. Yaoyorozu, Koda, Bakugo, and Kirishima all stood around him, soaking wet and shivering. A second later, Asui joined them.

"I think that's everyone, ribbit."

Yaoyorozu handed out small towels for everyone. "I don't think it'd be wise to use my quirk too much, but use these to dry off some of the water."

“We need to get out of here,” Kirishima stated, turning his head to where he could see villains floating around. “We’re sitting ducks up here, and there’s no telling how powerful their quirks are.”

“These assholes obviously don’t know ours though.” Bakugo deducted. “They put Frog and Dunce face in the water zone.”

“Man, you gotta stop calling me that!”

“I agree,” Yaoyorozu said. “Kaminari can easily incapacitate them all if he fires off an attack with enough voltage. Perhaps Midoriya’s warning has given us the advantage.”

Bakugo glared, then turned his scalding gaze on Denki. “Fry ‘em, Dunce face.”

“Make sure no to kill them, though,” Asui piped in. “I don’t think you want that on your conscience.”

“Yeah, no thanks,” he said nervously.

Okay, you can do this, he thought as he approached the edge of the boat. *Just enough to incapacitate them. You can do this.*

Lightning crackled dangerously in his palms. Denki knew he was no good at long-distance shots that didn’t let him use Indiscriminate Shock but he could not throw himself back in without chancing himself getting attacked by all the villains and he could not hurt his classmates by losing control and firing in all directions.

You can do this.

Denki’s hands shot bolts of hot light into the water, their energy crackling around him. He stopped in the next second, cautiously looking out at their incapacitated foes.

“Okay, with that done,” Kirishima glanced up at the window where the controls waited for them. “Does anyone know how to drive a boat?”

She groaned as she stood, rain from the Downpour Zone hitting her hard. Ojiro, Tokoyami, Todoroki, Mineta, and Aoyama stood around her.

“Hagakure, that’s you, right?” Ojiro asked, looking over at where the rain collided with her body.

“Yeah,” She confirmed, nodding even if they couldn’t see it.

Before anyone could say anything else, people- *villains,* her mind supplied- came from the darkness, poised to attack. Unluckily for them, Todoroki froze them all in the next few seconds, cutting their assault short.

“I thought that after they said they were after All Might that these would be powerful soldiers,” Todoroki said as he approached the twitching figures encased in ice. “But these are all just thugs.”

“They thought out how to isolate us and make sure we couldn’t alert anyone, but I think Midoriya knew more than he should have about the warp guy,” Ojiro glanced at the closest villain to him. “Think we should ask them about their plan?”

Frost twirled in Todoroki’s open palm, his breath coming out in visible puffs. “Yes.” He said simply.

The grunts didn’t hold out long.

He smacked harshly into the ground, head bouncing off of the pavement and his goggles went dark, rendering him blind. Pain hoarded his thoughts but he managed to push off his goggles, the world lighting up in blazing colors.

Crap, he was in the middle of the plaza.

“Why would Kurogiri send you here?” a voice rasped close by. “Does he want me to kill you? Are you a present?” Izuku looked up, freezing when he met the man’s visible eye through the fingers of a disembodied hand. The villain froze, too, his gaze sharpening with suspicion. “Take your mask off,” he ordered.

Blood trickled down the side of his face from where his goggles cut in. Every nerve in his body buzzed with adrenaline as he reached for his respirator and pulled it down. The visible vermillion eye widened as Izuku struggled not to gag on the rancid odor of so many people.

“Izuku,” the villain stated with too much familiarity, sounding oddly

surprised.

“Why are you attacking UA?” Izuku questioned, ignoring everything else. “What’s your motive?”

He had the gall to chuckle. “We’re here to kill All Might,”

His spine straightened at the declaration, mustering up as much false bravado as he could. “I get that he’s a bit of a bastard, but killing him seems like a bit much,” he said, trying not to cough. “And he’s not even here, so if your beef is with him, why do any of us need to fight?”

“Bastard?” Handyman developed a dangerous edge of excitement in his tone. “You have no idea how glad I am to hear you say that, Izuku.”

His eyelid twitched. “Okay, enough with the-”

What the *hell* is that?

Behind Handjob was a daunting, scarred figure with an exposed brain and bulging eyes. But Izuku wasn’t focused on that. His eyes were glued to the way the auras fluctuated and flickered. No one had more than one color. No one’s aura completely disappeared.

“You made that out of people,” Izuku realized, staring up at the bird-beaked monstrosity that used to be people. “Shit, *you made that out of people-”*

“How did you know?” the villain queried with apt intrigue. “What do you know about my Nomu?”

“Enough.” He shook, taking a step back. “What did you do to them?”

Bizarrely, the villain balked at his blatant horror, his stance shifting with discomfort as he glanced back at the Nomu. Izuku’s hand trailed down to his gun, but the villain began turning back and he relaxed his arm again.

“The Doctor made Nomu for Sensei. I didn’t know anything until a couple of weeks ago,” he attempted to assure. Then, with trepidation, “Did Kurogiri know who you were? Is that why he sent you?”

Putting his weight onto the heels of his feet, Izuku fought the urge to bolt. “Why would he know who I am?” Izuku dared to ask. “How do

you know who I am?"

The chortle the villain made was soft, like he knew something Izuku didn't, and the sound made bells ring in his memories.

"C'mon, Izuku," he encouraged, knowing Izuku was finally seeing something. "You're my player two, remember?"

Izuku's world stilled.

The villains around them didn't matter. His classmates, Aizawa, everything was shoved into a corner, the singular wine-red eye consuming his thoughts.

"Take the hand off of your face," Izuku ordered, *needing* to know.

He listened without hesitation, the dismembered appendage resting in his hand instead of on his face.

Unbidden, tears blurred his vision. "Raki?" His voice broke, too many emotions washing over him at once.

Tomura's eyes, older and haunted in ways they weren't when they last saw each other, looked at him with warmth. "Who else would I be?"

A wet bark of laughter broke from Izuku and, suddenly, he had to get closer, he had to make sure that his friend was *real* and not just some crazy illusion his brain conjured for him. *Be real,* he begged, taking a hesitant step forward. *Please, please be-*

A stray chunk of the brick ground smacked him in the face, debris from the fight that Aizawa was still hauling himself through. Blood welled in the new cut in his face, a stinging sensation rushing to meet the high of energy that reminded him of everything Tomura made him forget about.

"You're wearing peoples' hands," Izuku muttered. Tomura's hopeful expression faltered. "You're attacking my classmates and trying to kill my teachers. You've got some- some *experiment* with you. Raki, what are you *doing?"*

"I'm doing something that has to be done," he said gravely. "Don't you remember how they shunned you, Izuku? How society left you to rot-"

"Like you did?" Izuku snarled, disbelief rapidly turning into rage. "The *second* I couldn't give you what you wanted from me, you put me right

back where you found me." Tears burned behind his eyes, a sob threatening to crawl out of his throat.

His outburst only served to distress him further. "No, Izuku, I- I would *never-"* Anger replaced concern, his demeanor shifting. "It wasn't my choice."

"And this is?" Izuku gestured out at the chaos around them. "Why are you *here,* Raki?"

"To kill the Symbol of Peace," he repeated stoutly.

"Why?" Izuku nagged insistently. "Why do you want to kill him?"

Tomura seethed, a switch flipping inside of him. "He makes people complacent. *All* of hero society is misleading. They say they'll save everyone, All Might says it, but they *can't.* People are left to die, Izuku. Kids like us are abandoned and the citizens won't do a thing because they think a hero will take care of it."

The *"like us"* slams into like a hammer because Izuku knows he is right. Plenty of people came into contact with him enough to realize that something was wrong. Teachers, counsellors, other kids, they didn't take the time to ask him where his parents were. They left him alone for *years.*

Mitsu gave him a chance, though. She let him into her life and into her family. Aizawa took immediate action when he found out Izuku was living by himself.

Izuku was, by some miracle, getting his happy ending.

Tomura was still hurting. No one had come to save him.

"He's not even here, Raki," Izuku said carefully. "You should leave." He hated himself for suggesting it because his friend was *right there.* But his friend was different. His friend was committing a crime and planning to murder the Symbol of Peace.

He bristled, hurt flashing across his exposed face before irritation took its place. "He will be here," he insisted through gritted teeth. "And when he arrives, Nomu will take care of him."

Izuku reached for his gun, the motion calling Tomura's eyes to his hand. "Raki, please," he whispered with a shaking voice, pleading.

“You could come back with us,” Tomura offered, making his heart skip. “We could be friends again.”

The offer should not have been appealing, not when his teacher was fighting for his life to his right and his classmates were god knows where. Not when the Nomu towered over both of them and was a not-so-alive testament to the terrible things that occurred during his absence. But it was. Izuku’s skin felt cold as he remembered the warmth he felt when he was curled against his side. He remembered the foreign sense of safety that surrounded him.

Izuku met Tomura’s eyes with unease churning in his gut.

The past is not what Tomura is offering.

Izuku unholstered his gun, flicked safety off, and shot before he could rethink the action.

A villain with a heteromorphic quirk on the other side of the plaza was hit with Explosion and abruptly launched away from Aizawa, who battled several people at a time.

He turned the barrel on Tomura, knowing Stick would shoot out next.

“Izuku.” Tomura regarded him warily.

“Leave.” The gun trembled in his grip, his finger pressing down on the trigger.

Stick spread across the Nomu’s broad chest, the bright green severely unamusing when the auras surround the Nomu disappeared completely.

They flickered back to life after several seconds dragged by, staying concentrated around the brain.

“Nomu,” Tomura called. “Incapacitate him.”

A punch landed in his gut, too fast to counter and the blow sent Izuku flying. Distantly, he heard Aizawa shout in alarm. Something snapped in his chest when he landed, agony piercing through his muddled thoughts.

Deeming him incapacitated, the Nomu didn’t come for him until Tomura said, “Grab him.”

Spitting blood onto the pavement, Izuku stood on legs that would

surely give out on him at any second and unsheathed the dagger at his hip and almost laughed because he could still hear Kurogiri's voice in his head, telling him to adjust his grip.

Before his body could betray him, Izuku rushed the Nomu. The beast was slow, the order to grab not something as urgent as protecting Tomura, and it allowed Izuku to get in close. The Nomu grabbed him off the ground as instructed and practically crushed the air out of his lungs. Izuku wheezed and used the close proximity to test a theory and hope he got lucky.

The Nomu screeched as Izuku's dagger dug into its exposed brain.

Peoples' auras were spread along the entire body but the Nomu's… the colors it emitted stayed at the head. At the brain.

He resisted the bile rising in his throat and stabbed again.

The colors disappeared completely with one final jab and they both collapsed.

Izuku threw up, still trapped in the Nomu's hands.

That- that used to be *people.* Some form of consciousness had *stayed* and Izuku had killed them-

Tomura appeared above him and grabbed him by his arm, jerking him painfully from the Nomu's dead body. His hero costume slowly turned to ash under the touch of all of his fingers. "You killed him," Tomura spat. "He was meant for *All Might* and you *killed him."*

An agonized sound ripped from his burning throat as Tomura's hand *squeezed,* the flesh of his arm flaking away-

Abruptly, Tomura's quirk halted.

"Midoriya," Aizawa yelled, eyes glowing red. "Your quirk!"

Oh.

Izuku's officially a dumbass.

Tomura froze as Izuku's quirk consumed him. Aizawa limped towards them, but Kurogiri came back at the worst possible moment.

A warp opened under Aizawa.

No, no no no-

Tomura's quirk resumed without Aizawa there to stop it.

"Release Tomura, Izuku."

Izuku spat at him, red staining his teeth.

The next events happened much too fast for Izuku to comprehend in his addled state of mind but he could never mistake the sound of Bakugo's explosions. Izuku dimly registered Kirishima's bright red hair. He frantically began prying Tomura's hand off of his shoulder, attempting to stop his injury from getting worse, but Izuku made a sloppy grab for his bare skin.

"I need-" he stifled wet coughs. "I can k-keep Raki trapped." He insisted, reaching again.

Kirishima shook his head. "I'll get you out, okay?" he said. "You're-Midoriya, you aren't looking so good."

"Don't let 'im touch you with five fingers," Izuku warned. "Throw 'im, far as you can."

Kirishima bared a strained grin and tore Tomura away from him. He watched Kirishima vault him across the plaza and mustered up an impressed stare.

"Good job, Kiri," he slurred, legs finally giving up on him.

Ochako stood with her friends clustered around her, the sirens of ambulances and police cars wailing above the dull ringing in her ears.

Kirishima was still covered in blood, staring at the drying liquid with a distant look in his eyes. Tsuyu was beside her, wrapped in a blanket and damp from her drop in the Shipwreck Zone.

The ones who hadn't been able to avoid the warper's portals were split up, half ending up in one Zone, the rest ending up in another. All of her classmates were soaking wet from rain or being dunked in a lake.

Aizawa had been found in the Conflagration Zone with several injuries and quirk exhaustion. Thirteen had been taped up by Sero before the heroes and ambulances arrived but they were in bad shape.

Ochako didn't know where Iida was. She thought of how he bolted out of the USJ when they distracted the warper and wondered if they kept him at the school just to be safe.

She hoped he was safe.

The visage of Midoriya's limp body in Kirishima's arms flashed in her mind, reminding her that she should be alert. What if the villains weren't done? She needed to move. She had to make sure everyone was okay-

"Uraraka," Tsuyu put a hand on her shoulder. "We're safe. The heroes are here."

Ochako deflated and put her shaking hands under her legs, glancing around at her classmates. Even Bakugo was being quiet.

One by one, they all left, parents coming to them and whisking them away from the USJ. Ochako waited, having called her parents when she managed to gather herself. Midnight stood beside her, a comforting presence, and waited with her in silence.

"Could I have done more?" Ochako croaked, shoulders shaking with sobs.

Midnight put a gentle hand under her chin and forced her to raise her watery gaze. "You did more than enough, Uraraka." She said heartfeltly. "None of this, *any* of it, is your fault. Don't convince yourself otherwise."

At home, her real home, not the apartment, she curled up on her bed and tried not to think about how excited she had been to do this exercise. How excited all of them had been.

She didn't even know if Midoriya was *alive-*

Ochako didn't manage to fall asleep that night.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for comments and kudos!! I hope you enjoyed the arc!

BYE

The Aftermath

Chapter Notes

> It's been sooo long! I'm sorry but this took a while to make with school starting and me having to rewrite it a couple times.
> Edit: 2/12/2021

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shouta stared at Midoriya's prone form, which was wrapped in thick bandages while he had gotten off with a few broken bones and minor head trauma. His landing in the Conflagration Zone had been rough, leaving him with burns and a gash to the face that nearly took out his eye.

"Stop that," Hizashi warned, sensing his thoughts. "You fought a horde of villains, give yourself some credit."

"I should have protected him," he snapped. "I was right there, Hizashi. And I couldn't do anything for him."

Hizashi smacked his arm. "They outnumbered you, Shouta. I saw the amount of perps they took away from the plaza; it's amazing you held out as long as you did." Hizashi wrapped his arms around him and pulled him close.

"I said I would help him," Shouta hissed, gripping his husband's shirt. "Fuck, I said I'd help him."

"And you have," Hizashi said firmly. "The doctors say there's no lasting damage to the rest of his body, just that he'll have to deal with a skin graft and a few scars from the surgery."

The damage Midoriya sustained from the dead-eyed monster and the other man's quirk had forced the doctors to find a way to prioritize his healing. The doctors or nurses on-site with healing quirks tried to touch him but quickly found that was a fast way to be caught in his quirk. The subsequent surgery that took place had been as hasty as a delicate procedure could be.

Midoriya died on the operating table once, according to the surgeons, and was resuscitated after a minute and three seconds. That's, what,

three times the kid has died?

Skin grafts had changed over the years, mutation quirks varying too widely to use the old methods. Midoriya's shoulder and upper arm would be marked with silver to make up for skin, the surrounding skin marred with scars that reached across his body and crept up the side of his neck.

"I have a scar on my face from falling the wrong way." Shouta gritted his teeth. "Midoriya has-"

"We're not playing a game of who got it worse, Shou," Hizashi said gently. "We'll be here for him when he wakes up, and then we'll be with him for everything after."

Hitoshi was *not* having a good week.

Slouched in a hospital chair, he watched Izuku's heartbeat on the monitor. Dad and Pops were outside the room, talking to a detective, and that left him alone to eavesdrop because the walls were thin and he should be a part of this conversation.

"The statements of your students have been taken," Detective Tsukauchi informed them. "We have the ringleaders' names. At least some of them. The warp villain introduced himself as Kurogiri-" Why was that name familiar? "-and Midoriya reportedly called the villain with the disintegration quirk 'Raki'."

Hitoshi slid off of his chair, causing a clatter.

Dad opened the door and fixed him with a deadpan stare. "If you're going to eavesdrop, do so quietly."

"Dad," he said seriously. "Dad, did I hear him right? Does Izuku-"

"We'll ask him about it when he wakes up." Dad closed the door again, and they moved away from the room to prevent him from hearing anything else.

Hitoshi grumbled as he righted his chair, dropping himself back into it. Since arriving, the only interesting thing that happened was the Hatsumes' arrival.

The Hatsumes nearly started a fight in the hospital lobby when the nurse declined their demands to see Izuku. Pops had stepped in, mediating until a compromise could be reached. They weren't technically Izuku's family (Ms. Ayumi looked ready to throw hands when the nurse said it) they would wait until he was moved out of the ICU.

Guilt knotted in his stomach. He had known Izuku for a couple of days and he was allowed to see him but the family he made for himself wasn't allowed in.

Izuku's heart rate picked up and Hitoshi slingshotted out of his seat to stand at his bedside, ready to push the 'help' button if he needed to.

"Why are you so complicated?" Hitoshi complained to no one. "I get that you didn't have control over the shit other people did to you, but please tell me you're not involved with villains that attacked UA." Silence permeated in the room, the steady beep of a machine telling him that Izuku was still alive. "I mean, if you are, you should check with them because they beat you up pretty good and allies don't pull that kind of shit. If you're in too deep or something, my dads will help you. They're good like that."

Izuku's heartbeat slowed back down.

Hitoshi sat in the cheap, uncomfortable hospital chair and tried to distract himself with cat videos. "Get better, damnit." he muttered to Izuku. "I'm gonna kick your ass for making us worry."

Without warning, Izuku's heart rate skyrocketed.

Izuku would sleep for infinity and that was final. He pushed at the awareness nagging at his senses, the dull ache it brought far too uncomfortable. His body didn't listen, hauling him into awareness with an agonizing amount of leisure. The world was quite dull with the sound on mute and his vision restricted to the backs of his eyelids. The floating sensation faded as he became more aware of the gravity holding him down.

Pain filtered into his senses and he imagined himself rolling his eyes. Of course he's in pain, 'cause why not?

"-making us worry."

Hitoshi? If Hitoshi was with him then Yamada and Aizawa probably were, too. What was making them worry? Should Izuku be worried? The only thing that could make *all* of them worry was a real crisis, so, what? Did the cats do something heinous? Hana was always rude but Mac and Cheese were devious. Tora was flat out clumsy, and Smoothie had no regard for the people or things around her-

Three distinct auras flashed in his mind's eye, all huddled around one specific area. What was that? Peoples' auras don't usually meld like that.

His entire body tensed as pain seared through the nerves of his upper body. If he could, Izuku would have cried out but nothing broke the silence that was rapidly becoming suffocating.

As if in response to his panic, noise reached his ears, finally making it through the haze of sleep. He could hear people moving around him, now he wanted to *see them.*

Why couldn't he see them?

A single person came to mind, memories crashing into him with the force of a freight train.

Tomura.

His eyes shot open and he wrenched his arms to his chest. Where was he, what did they do to him, why was he hurting? Hands held him down and he let out a panicked shout. *No no no, don't touch me.* People were yelling. The hands moved away and he brought his mobile arm to his chest, squeezing his eyes shut. One of his arms was heavy and something was covering his face. Izuku froze.

His arm.

His head snapped down to examine his scarred arm, then slowly turned to look at his other arm. His right shoulder was stiff, covered with layers of bandages. Izuku began shaking. *It's still there,* he assured himself, glancing down at his exposed forearm. The thought did little to reassure him, old fear bubbling in his lungs.

"Midoriya." Izuku's gaze jerked up, finding a familiar face above. "It's alright, you're safe."

In an attempt to speak, he ended up wheezing and throwing himself into a coughing fit that raked up the dry inside of his throat. Aizawa

handed him water and he was stopped from greedily consuming the whole cup with one gulp. Aizawa was wearing a plain black t-shirt and dark sweatpants, bandages covering certain areas in wrapping not nearly as thick as the ones on Izuku's right upper body.

"A-Are you okay?" was the first coherent sentence out of his mouth.

Yamada, who sat at the end of his bed, huffed a laugh. Aizawa pinned him with an unreadable stare. "Of course you would ask that first." He sighed wearily. "Yes, Midoriya. I am fine. So is 1-A. Thirteen was the only other person with serious injuries and they're going to make a full recovery."

"Sorry about freaking out," Izuku mumbled. "The last time I woke up and couldn't move my arm…" He wiggled his left hand in the air and dropped it awkwardly.

"You weren't sure you were safe, it was a natural response." Yamada soothed. He looked at the clock above the door. "You've got some time to rest before the detective wants to see you to take your statement."

He has to give a statement? That makes sense. Does that mean he would have to tell the detective everything? He thought back to the stone grip of the Nomu's hands crushing him as he killed it. Fuck, he killed people. Sure, they weren't exactly alive but they were still *there,* somehow. Their consciousness remained alive inside of the Nomu's brain and he stuck a knife in there.

"I-I need a b-bin," he choked out. A small tin garbage can was thrust into his space and Izuku promptly vomited the sparse contents of his stomach. When the nausea settled down, he accepted another cup of water.

"Did they get away?" Did Kurogiri escape? Did he take Tomura with him?

Their auras reached outward, making Izuku flinch. "N-Nevermind,"

"No, it's fine," Aizawa said flatly. "We just… We need to know if you have connections to them."

Izuku shook his head, squeezing his eyes shut. "I-I haven't seen either of them in, in *years.* I didn't know they- that they-" *were villains. Were planning to attack UA.*

“Kid,” Aizawa called. “It’s okay.”

“My name is Detective Tsukauchi and I have a lie detection quirk.” the detective introduced himself, a recorder sitting on the bed. “I am here to take your statement regarding the events that occurred at the USJ.”

Izuku nodded, psyching himself up. The detective said more introductory things about his rights and that they could do this on a later date if he was too scrambled at the moment. Izuku just wanted to get this over with.

“But first, I have been informed that you knew the villains that attacked UA.” Detective Tsukauchi paused, flipping open a notepad. “Could you explain your affiliation with the League of Villains?”

“I was really young when I met them, six, I think.” He steeled his nerves and kept his gaze low. Aizawa was the only other person in the room with him and the detective. Aizawa was the only one he wanted to know right now. If he ended up hating him or thinking he wasn’t safe to be around, at least Aizawa would be straight about it. “My parents abandoned me pretty early on and I was kind of just wandering around when I came across Dagobah beach.

“I… One of the piles collapsed on me.” He didn’t want to tell them about how desperate he had been, sticking his arm inside of a fragile stack of rusted metal. “I started screaming my head off and Kurogiri showed up. I don’t remember what happened, blood loss messed me up, you know? But I said something that made me worth saving, I guess.”

Izuku looked down at his left arm. “When I woke up, my arm was in a cast so thick I couldn’t move.” Izuku clenched his jaw, eyes darting to the recorder. “Another kid was in the room.” Both adults stiffened at the implication that there were more children on the line. “His name was Shigaraki Tomura and he was the villain with the disintegration quirk.”

“How old would you say he was at the time?” Detective Tsukauchi questioned.

“A few years older than me,” Izuku guessed. “I don’t know his exact

age, or Kurogiri's."

"That's fine, continue."

"They treated me well. I definitely didn't want to leave."

"Do you have any idea how long you were unconscious?"

He glanced away, shifting uncomfortably. "No," he said uneasily. "Sometimes I would go to sleep and something would change. But- I, I couldn't tell what *happened.* Once, I woke up really disoriented and the cast was just *gone.* I was so excited at the time because I could finally move around and see that my arm was still there, but thinking back, I'm very unsettled."

"Do you know when they kidnapped you and when you got out?"

The words the detective used felt odd to describe his time with Tomura and Kurogiri. He ignored the squirming feeling in his chest. "School ended recently." he tried to think of the weather when he woke up back on Dagobah. "When they put me back, school was about to start again."

"They kept you for a summer?" he clarified. "And you were taken and returned at Dagobah Municipal beach?"

"Yes, sir."

Izuku continued to illustrate details he picked up, glazing over the more personal time he spent being tutored by Kurogiri and playing with Tomura. "They mentioned a 'Sensei' and a 'Doctor'," Izuku said. "I never met or saw either of them, but the doctor must've been a good one, to be able to repair my arm like this."

"Were they ever referred to as anything else around you?"

"Kurogiri once called Sensei 'Master'. But, no, I never heard their actual names."

Detective Tsukauchi tapped his notepad. "You said they 'put you back', not that you escaped. Why?"

"This is going to sound bad, but if I had been given the choice, I would've stayed with them." Izuku gnawed on the inside of his cheek. "They made me use my quirk but when nearly it nearly killed me, they realized they had no real use for me. And, why would they keep

someone they couldn't benefit from?"

Aizawa's eyes narrowed. "Midoriya-"

Izuku sighed. "I know," he said lightly, and Aizawa must not have believed him because his scowl lasted a few more seconds before he deemed it a topic for later discussion.

They finally moved onto the USJ after a few more clarifying questions. He described his account of the beginning, how he "saw" the villains before they appeared and tried to explain Kurogiri's weak spots.

"Kurogiri didn't recognize me when he teleported me into the plaza because of my goggles and respirator. Tomura recognized me seconds after I took off my goggles." Izuku paused, his hand clenching around the bedsheets. "He tried to convince me to go back with them. When I wouldn't… he- he sicced the Nomu on me."

"The Nomu," Detective Tsukauchi repeated.

"It was three people. Before." Izuku strained to say. "Tomura said that Sensei and the Doctor made it. Made it out of *people.* And I- I *killed* it. I killed *them.* " His body trembled with guilt, tears building in his eyes. He whispered, "They were still alive, somehow. And I-"

"Midoriya, the Nomu attacked you. It nearly killed you." Aizawa leaned into his space, catching his gaze. "You made a hard decision in a critical situation in order to survive."

"Were the people at all present?" Tsukauchi asked, earning a glare from Aizawa.

Izuku shook his head, raking in a quivering breath. "The Nomu was inanimate until Tomura made it do something. Their auras, they disappeared when the Nomu was told to do something. I've never seen auras do that before. They're not *supposed* to flicker or go away."

Detective Tsukauchi paused, hesitating to ask the next question. "I apologize for this, but how did you kill the Nomu?"

"The brain," Izuku gestured at his own head, keeping his eyes glued to the bedsheets. "Their auras were collected around its head, so I used my dagger to go for- for the brain."

Detective Tsukauchi nodded and swiftly concluded the questioning.

“Kid,” Aizawa said once the detective had left. “Don’t beat yourself up over this.”

“How can I not?” Izuku snapped, voice breaking. “I killed three people, Aizawa. How do I not-”

“You were calling the Nomu an ‘it’, Midoriya. But whenever you spoke of the auras, you said ‘they’. That implies they are separate. This ‘Doctor’ and Shigaraki’s Sensei killed them, not you. I doubt they were very alive inside the Nomu, Midoriya.”

Izuku stayed quiet, keeping his head hung and his eyes closed to ward off the moisture in his eyes.

The Hatsumes practically refused to leave his room once they were allowed inside. They smothered Izuku with relief and wore special clothing that covered their skin so that they could touch him without him having to worry about his quirk.

“It pays to have connections in Support.” Mitsu winked, waggling her gloved fingers. “I have some of these bad boys waiting for you too.”

He blinked at her. “Really?” he said. She gave him a look that said, *why would I lie?* “Mitsu…” he smiled.

She waved off his gratitude. “Hey now, none of that. You should feel safe around us without having to worry about your quirk.”

A pang of guilt made him wince. “Are you guys mad that I lied to you for months?”

Ayumi made an odd choked noise that signified her unique laughter. *“We love you,”* she signed, her eyes sincere. *“And a quirk is nothing compared to that.”*

“Do we wish we had known sooner so that we could give you proper coverage? Yes.” Mitsu admitted. “But we’re here now, so we’ll help.”

At Izuku's teary thank yous, Mitsu presented a large grin. “Now now, none of that, greenbean.” She chided, gently putting her hand onto his face and tilting his head up. “Chin up, yeah? And how ‘bout you stay outta trouble for your thank you?”

Ayumi agreed wholeheartedly. *“I don’t like having to fight with nurses to see you.”*

“You fought a nurse?” Izuku asked, incredulous.

Mei shook her head, looking annoyed. “Almost. Mom *almost* started a brawl when we were told we weren’t allowed to see you because we ‘aren’t family’.” she said with aggravated quotation gestures.

“Mic stepped in before anything could happen,” Mitsu elaborated with a huff. “Shame. Yumi coulda totally had security called on us.”

“Which is why it’s a good thing I never got the chance.”

“I suppose.”

Izuku just laughed, the knot in his chest loosening, and allowed himself to be comfortable. Just for now.

Chapter End Notes

Y'all. You're all so great. I appreciate the support and love reading comments if you have something to say!
Here's some fluff

Until next time

"It's called human decency."

Chapter Notes

Fluff! And! Angst!
Self-worth/esteem issues included
This was filler and I rewrote one of the scenes like five times but I think this turned out okay

Edit: 3/8/2021
Edit: 5/14/2021

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“No way.” Izuku backed away from the three adults. “I won’t do it.”

Aizawa pinned him with an unimpressed glare. “You agreed to train and get better with your quirk.” He pointed at Ayumi and Mitsu. “Ayumi is willing to participate and Mitsu’s quirk will let us know if either of you needs to stop.”

Izuku’s body clammed up, his chest tightening at the thought of their faces once he used his quirk on one of them. They would hate him. Ayumi would come back after he used his quirk on her and she would never let him get close to her again. Mitsu would see what he did to her wife and she would never want to see him again. “No,” he protested weakly.

“Midoriya,” Aizawa said. “We won’t be angry with you for using your quirk. We won’t think you aren’t worth our time. We won’t leave.”

He shook his head, curling in on himself. “You’ll hate me,” he argued, desperate to find a way to free them all of this situation. “I don’t want you to hate me-”

“Izuku,” Mitsu called, drawing him out of his spiraling. Their eyes met and suddenly Izuku could not tear his gaze from hers. “You know us well enough, yeah? Don’t think about the past. Trust us.”

Izuku stared at Ayumi’s hands instead of her face. If he looked at her

blank, distant expression he wouldn't be able to stomach practicing his quirk like this. Aizawa and Mitsu sat a couple of meters away, observing as he used his quirk on Ayumi. His stomach churned with regret and his hands trembled but he kept himself from stamping down on his quirk or letting go of her hands. He said he would give this a chance.

Izuku stared at Ayumi's hands and wished that he could focus on the warmth of her hands instead of the limp way they hung in his grasp.

Pain struck his temples and he gratefully praised Aizawa's rule, releasing her hands immediately. Aizawa said that he had to let go the moment he began feeling pain or they ran the risk of injuring him further. Recovery Girl cleared him for this, but only if they promised not to put strain on Izuku's body. The injuries that he sustained from the Nomu were concentrated in his abdomen, but Tomura's quirk had dealt his right arm and shoulder a considerable amount of damage. The graft itched terribly and the pain that sometimes struck him made him grit his teeth. If he tapped the bandages covering the silver patch in his body, he could not feel the contact beyond the sting of pain that agitating his wound granted him.

His abdomen and shoulder were still wrapped with bandages but, thankfully enough, his left arm was completely unimpaired by the events at the USJ. His right arm was in a sling and there were light wraps around his lower throat, where the extent of Tomura's quirk had reached.

Maybe he should stop calling him Tomura.

Ayumi stumbled back slightly, dazed. She steadied herself and took a deep breath. Her hands were shaking when she raised them to sign. *"I am okay."*

Izuku had a hard time believing her, observing the tense way she held herself.

Ayumi snapped her fingers in his face. *"I am okay,"* she repeated, emphasizing each word. *"You did not hurt me. I still love you."*

Izuku's body lurched forward with the desire to be close but he stomped on the instinct. *No,* he berated himself. *Don't touch her-*

She took the choice from his hands, stepping forward and wrapping him in a gentle hug. Cautiously avoiding any exposed areas of skin, she held him. Izuku's head emptied of his anxiety, a serene sensation

that was quickly overtaken by the surge of emotions that rapidly consumed him. He leaned against her and trembled with relief.

Once they separated, Ayumi explained what her experience was like, coinciding with Aizawa's experience. Of course, she saw something different than Aizawa but his quirk seemed to follow a general pattern. Put the person in a completely isolated void and then manifest that person's insecurities.

They visited Mei in the Support labs before Ayumi and Mitsu had to leave and go to work. Aizawa split off from them to go to the teachers' lounge to see Yamada.

"How was it?" she asked enthusiastically. "Are you okay? You look okay. Do you need more support gear? What kind do you need? Depending on how complicated it is, I can have it ready by-"

"MeiMei," he interrupted. "We're all okay. And I don't need new gear yet."

Upon being asked, Ayumi regaled their training. *"At first, there was nothing, then a voice,* my *voice but distorted started insulting me. A figure began to come into existence with me and formed this odd mirage me? I didn't look too good. Very dehydrated."* Pointing at Mei and Izuku, she raised her eyebrows. *"Remember, kids, drink lots of water."*

Mei put a hand to her chest in shock. "And lose my teenage dignity?" She gasped dramatically. "What sort of self-respecting tennager *hydrates* themselves?"

"The kind that wants my special curry."

"You dare threaten my curry privileges?"

"I'm your mother, of course I dare."

"All I'm hearing is that you don't want to buy those spices again."

"I don't." Ayumi deadpanned, throwing Mei off for a second. *"I have to fight someone in the store each time we go to get all the ingredients."*

Mitsu laughed boisterously. "But the payoff is nice, ain't it?" She elbowed her wife in the side. "And I can get the spices and shit if people keep giving you trouble."

Ayumi gave her wife an assessing side-eye and shook her head. *"The*

chowhounds alone would bulldoze through you."

"The hell is a chowhound?" she asked offendedly.

Ayumi turned to Mei and Izuku and shook her head, as if to say, *see what I mean?*

Izuku stepped into 1-A without much thought, his mood still soaring from the Hatsumes' antics, and was completely blindsided by the eruption of noise that came from his classmates.

"Midoriya!" Several of them shouted in chorus.

Izuku jumped, up and away, panic replacing his previous ease. "What?" he asked in fright. "What'd I do?"

Kirishima and Uraraka were the first ones to reach him, vaulting past their classmates without a thought to Iida's attempts to calm everyone down. Izuku hurriedly stepped out of range when Uraraka tried to grab his free arm and she froze, suddenly taking in the bandages still wrapped around his body and the sling holding his right arm.

"Sorry," she hastily apologized. "I- Sorry. But you're okay, right?"

Izuku nodded. "I am."

Kirishima's hands twitched at his sides, his arms tense, but he smiled brightly. "Man, that's great! You had us all pretty worried."

Iida finally cut in, making an effort to pull his classmates a couple of steps back. "Please remember what Aizawa-sensei told us! Midoriya is still injured and has an aversion to touch, so please keep your distance!"

His words were true. Factual.

They broke his heart.

"Woah, what're you wearing?" Kaminari pointed at his extra layer of clothes that peaked through his uniform and covered his hands.

"A precaution so I can't use my quirk," Izuku explained, only serving to confuse his classmates more.

“Is that… healthy?” Kirishima questioned.

“I can’t turn my quirk off,” Izuku held up his gloved hand. “And it’s triggered by physical contact. If I don’t wear this, I would have to be constantly worried about trapping someone unintentionally.”

Yaoyorozu made a confused sound. “But we’ve made contact before, Midoriya,”

“Yeah, that,” he said awkwardly. “That’s because I was making sure my quirk couldn’t do anything.”

“Wait, hold up.” Jirou waved her ear jacks in sync with her hands. “So, you can’t turn it off but you can stop it? How does that work?”

Yaoyorozu gasped, her eyes widening in disbelief. She shot to her feet, her concern palpable. “Midoriya, did you-”

“I did,” he confessed, shifting on his feet uneasily.

“I am so lost,” Sero murmured.

Izuku glanced away from them, ashamed to admit that his quirk was disgusting enough to warrant him stuffing it in a box, never to be used. “I suppressed my quirk.” Izuku muttered. In his seat, Todoroki stiffened.

“How would that even work?” Jirou asked.

Yaoyorozu sighed. “Since most of you have mutation quirks, I suppose you aren’t physically capable of doing this, but for people with emitter quirks, we don’t have to use our quirks, right? Sometimes, when people think it is their only option- and it is *not,”* she emphasized, meeting Izuku’s eyes. “-they will subconsciously or purposefully clamp down on their quirk. This will prevent it being used, but if it goes on for long enough-”

“It will kill the weidler.” Todoroki finished, causing a heavy silence to fall on the class.

“So, I need to wear this,” Izuku continued. “Or I will fall back onto old habits very quickly.”

“That’s not a huge problem, right?” Ashido queried worriedly. She turned to Kaminari desperately, grabbing his shoulders. “People don’t just do that and no one talks about it?”

“I didn’t know about this!” Kaminari admitted, prying himself from her hold.

“It’s not a common occurrence for people to want to cut themselves off from their quirk,” Yaoyorozu assured. “It’s even less likely for someone to be able to keep the kind of focus it takes to suppress a quirk it takes to bring them to fatal conditions.”

Izuku squirmed under their gazes.

“You haven’t died, right, Mido?” Ashido asked, half-jokingly. Bakugo scowled and turned away from the commotion. When Izuku hesitated to answer, the class’ volume shot up again.

“Midoriya!” Uraraka cried. “Why-Why didn’t you have this stuff before? Shouldn’t your parents take care of that stuff?”

Ah, another thing I don’t want to talk about. “Yeah, they should’ve,” he agreed bitterly. He sighed. “It doesn’t matter. I’m here now and I won’t do it again.”

“Of course it matters! Midoriya, you practically admitted to *dying-”*

Kirishima was cut off by Aizawa standing up. “Quiet. Get in your seats.” His classmates listened, begrudgingly going back to their seats. “Your fight isn’t over yet.” Izuku froze, the rest of his classmates tensing with apprehension. “The Sports Festival is coming up.” They deflated, all the intensity in the room dissipating.

He really wished Aizawa would give them a break with the logical ruses.

Izuku stood up from his seat and let himself be immersed in his classmates’ chatter, sticking to Kirishima’s side as much as he was sticking to Izuku’s.

“You are okay, though?” he checked again.

Izuku smiled, assuring his friend again. “I’m fine, Kirishima. I have to visit Recovery Girl again before I’m cleared to participate in the physical exercises, but I’ll be fully healed in no time.”

Uraraka pumped her fist in the air, a strange kind of energy emitting

from her. “I’m going to do my best in the festival!” She shouted determinedly. Izuku grinned at the intensity of her declaration.

“Oh, uh, hey?” Izuku turned his head at the sound of Hagakure’s uncertain tone. His calm demeanor balked at the crowd that had amassed and was now blacking their exit. He blinked against the colorful lights and tried not to breathe deeply, lest he inhale the smell of their lack of self-confidence.

“So this is Class 1-A,” drawled a blonde who elbowed his way to the front. “I can’t say I’m impressed.”

Monoma, as he introduced himself, went on to call them arrogant.

Izuku listened to his remarks, to his claims, and seethed.

“I mean, you must be soaking up everything the press has to say about you! I’m jealous, if Class 1-B had been there, we would’ve gotten some coverage.” *Aizawa, fighting for his life and his students’.* “Class 1-A, the Hero class that fought against real villains and lived to tell the tale.” Monoma’s steely eyes, full of loathing, landed on Izuku and he smirked. “I even heard there was a quirkless kid that was such a liability that he had to be carried out.” *His classmates' faces as a portal opened beneath his feet.* “It’s no wonder the quirkless kid was the one to get hurt, he shouldn’t even be in the Hero course to begin with. How’d you get in, huh? You cheat?”

The faces behind Monoma became more angered, more disbelieving, as if they could not believe that a quirkless kid somehow achieved what they couldn’t. To someone else, they might have seemed formidable. But Izuku had his senses, and they told him that these people were nothing to be scared of. His classmates were getting defensive too now, on his behalf and their own but Izuku stood up and walked until he was toe to toe with Monoma.

“You’re calling *us* arrogant?” he clarified, Izuku’s voice slicing through any noise they were making without him having to raise it. He remembered the betrayed look in Shigaraki’s eyes. “You’re *jealous?”* Izuku simmered, near the end of his patience. “Just because we’re still alive for you to deprecate doesn’t mean you can spout shit about people you’ve never met.” *The weight of the dagger in his palms before he slammed down the final blow.* “We didn’t ask for any of this. And as for how I got in?”

The crowd almost seemed to lean in when he paused.

“I passed the exams quirkless. No cheats, just some elbow grease.” And a gun, but mostly elbow grease.

Monoma scoffed but it was weak. Shaky, like his resolve. “Without a quirk? I don’t-”

“Oh, I got something better than a quirk.” Izuku took a step forward. Monoma stepped back. “And in my experience, it’s not something you find often, so maybe try looking around for some, okay?”

“What’s this *rare* quality?” Monoma sneered.

He stepped forward again and the crowd parted for him. “It’s called human decency.”

Izuku walked away and didn’t look back.

Aizawa studied him from the other side of the workbench and Izuku looked up from his newly encoded analysis notebook. “Is this your way of telling me we should go?” he inquired, shutting the notebook closed. “Because if we need to leave, there are more direct ways of telling me that than staring at me silently for five minutes.”

“Apparently, I can’t leave you alone for five minutes without you causing trouble, so I’ve decided to see if my presence does anything to deter you.”

Izuku reared back in his seat, confused. “What?” He glanced away, trying to think of what he had done today that would cause Aizawa this much exasperation. “What’d I do?”

He huffed and Izuku bristled, images of his past teachers rolling their eyes at him, saying, *“I’ll spell it out for you,”* because they thought he was too dull, too scatterbrained, too ensnared in what they thought to be a fruitless future to understand when he had just asked a simple question to try and comprehend the material better. They called him a lost cause because he wasn’t *evolved* like the other students who had quirks.

Izuku wasn’t as dim-witted as they made him out to be. He recognized the change in their behaviors after the Sludge Villain Incident. After they realized he had a quirk. Teachers and students, no one bothered unnecessarily him anymore. He suddenly had worth and their

reactions made something ugly twist in his chest.

Aizawa was saying something, leaning in closer, with a gleam of concern lurking his dark eyes but Izuku didn't hear the words. Izuku focussed on his breathing, chanting to himself that Aizawa was not them. Aizawa was *good.* He had never treated him wrongly, never tried to make him think less of himself. For all that his instincts told him that teachers were to be treaded carefully around, Aizawa was the exception. Because, despite being a teacher, Aizawa had helped him. Given him a home and supported his dream.

So, he chanted quietly to himself, timing his breaths.

Aizawa is safe, he told himself.

"I'm glad you think so," Aizawa murmured, making Izuku jolt into full awareness. "Are you back with me?"

Izuku nodded, embarrassment burning his face red. "Sorry."

"Can you tell me what set you off?" Aizawa's words felt prying but Izuku knew answering would only help him in the long run.

"You-You're a teacher," he stated carefully, fiddling with his fingers. "I've never had a teacher like you before. Like any of you." It was true. Aizawa wasn't the only teacher that was different than he was accustomed to.

Izuku steadied himself with a calming breath. "They thought I was quirkless for a long time and it- I was never allowed to be good at anything. I was too devolved to possibly get a high grade without cheating, too careful about not provoking my classmates and disrupting the class. Even once they realized I had a quirk I wasn't enough. I wasn't the dirt beneath them anymore but I wasn't worth their time either. So, my experience with teachers isn't g-good."

Aizawa nodded, listening intently, and Izuku was so ashamed because how could he think that he was anything like them? Why was he so paranoid and-

"Midoriya," Aizawa called, his voice a low rumble. "Stay with me."

"You're different," Izuku said once he gathered himself again. "A-And that's new. I know you won't act like they did but I can't- I can't stop thinking that- that you might-" Izuku's voice fell away, his throat clogging with emotions and rendering him silent.

“Your expectations have been set, and years of experience have shown you that you were right to set them there. Now, you are in a new environment with new, unfamiliar people who defy those standards.” Aizawa slowly pressed his hand down onto Izuku’s shoulder, giving him time to stop him. When Izuku allowed the contact, he continued. “You can’t reset your instincts in a day, nor can you expect yourself to forget years of neglect overnight.”

“But you’re *different,”* Izuku insisted desperately. “You think I matter-”

“You do,” Aizawa said firmly.

“-and that’s the most I’ve ever gotten from a teacher. You shouldn’t have to deal with me thinking you’re like them, ‘cuz you’re not and-”

“Midoriya, give yourself time,” Aizawa ordered softly. “I won’t hold this against you, so take time to adjust. Realize that you are safe here and allow yourself some comfort. Okay, kid?”

Izuku nodded, not knowing what else he could do. “Okay.”

“I heard a certain someone decided to sass a mob today,” Hitoshi commented as he slid onto the couch. “Y’know I heard about the gathering during homeroom but I didn’t think you would leave my classmates so gobsmacked.”

Izuku stared at him incredulously. “Sassed… a mob?” he asked.

Hitoshi stopped short, an entirely new sort of amusement overcoming him. “Oh god, you don’t know, do you?” he laughed, the sound entirely delightful but the context made shift closer to Mac, who was positioned behind one of the throw pillows. “According to my classmates, Monoma, whoever the fuck that is, walked away like a wounded puppy because the quirkless kid in 1-A called him an arrogant prick and told him to get a new personality-”

Izuku began shaking his head. “I didn’t say that!” he shouted, startling the cats. “I told him to be a decent human being; he was being really rude!”

“Well, if he was talking shit, I guess you get a pass.”

A detail in Hitoshi’s words caught his attention, making his body

tense. “You… you said the rumors were calling me quirkless.”

Hitoshi nodded.

“Fuck,” Izuku cursed, slumping into the cushions with a terrible feeling of foreboding. “Damnit. Damn Monoma and his stupid vendetta.”

“Woah, what’s wrong?”

Izuku barked a bitter laugh. “I’m in for it, that’s what. You think people will leave me in peace once they realize a ‘quirkless’ kid got into the Hero course?”

“Dad won’t let people pull that kind of shit in UA,” Hitoshi assured him. “None of the teachers will. If anyone gives you crap, tell someone and it’ll be taken care of.”

Would it? The paranoid part of his mind asked. Being distrustful had been his salvation for so long. If he trusted the wrong person, he would be burned. He *had* been burned for trusting the wrong classmates and teachers.

But… this was uncharted territory. The conversation he had with Aizawa flashed in his head. People cared about his well-being here.

“Aizawa said I was safe here.” He glanced up at Hitoshi, uncertainty making him fidget. “I-I want to trust him. I want him to be right.”

“We can work with a little hope,” Hitoshi grinned. “Man, I can’t wait for the Festival. I’m gonna knock someone right out of their class.”

“Big talk for someone who can’t beat me in a spar.” Izuku teased. Recovery Girl had reluctantly cleared him for the Sports Festival a few days ago after their final healing session and once he found out Hitoshi had no plans for training, he couldn’t let his friend go on like that. He was incredibly thankful to Aizawa, who erased his quirk and allowed Recovery Girl to heal him without harm coming to anyone.

He guffawed, amused. “I doubt half your classmates fight as well as you do. If anything, I’m talking small.”

Izuku blushed fiercely, feeling unbearably hot. “Don’t- You- shouldn’t, I’m not that good!”

Hitoshi only laughed as he retreated into his room.

Crimson eyes. Dark hair. Dry skin. Raspy voice. Low laugh.

When had Tomura *(Shigaraki, Shigaraki, Shigaraki)* dyed his hair?

When, during those eight years, had he become a villain?

The *why* burned away any other stray thoughts.

Why did he become a villain?

Why did he want to kill All Might?

Why was he a leader of the League of Villains?

Why-

Why did he hurt me?

"You killed him,"

Blood-colored eyes. Light hair. Irritated skin. The smile on his face freezing, twisting into something terrible. His fingers pressing into his shoulder, Izuku's skin flaking away, his mind focused on the painapainpain-

Izuku's eyes shot open and he was faced with the darkness of his room. Cold sweat dampened his sheets and clothing. Slowly, Izuku rose and leaned forward on his knees. The urge to scream welled in his throat, a short, choked sound of anguish passing his lips before he bit his lip and tried not to hyperventilate.

He needed to see Tomura, he needed to look him in the eyes and see what gave him that haunted stare. People changed, it was an irrefutable fact, but children don't become homicidal maniacs out of nowhere. Something made him into the man he was now. The only question was *who.*

Kurogiri? Sensei? The Doctor? Someone else entirely?

Now his *friend* was a killer. He tried to kill Aizawa and Izuku. He led an attack meaning to kill All Might and when that didn't pan out, he went for the students as retribution. How the hell could he say that some part of him still held onto the memories of *Raki?* Of that clingy, stubborn boy who didn't exist anymore.

Izuku wondered if this was what grief felt like.

He mourned before, when he came to terms with the reality of his situation after Inko left. It took a long time for things to finally hit him. Sure, he knew she was gone, but she still kept him above water. She paid for the apartment and made sure he had the tools to survive. No contact but he thought she was still around, in her own way. He tried to believe that she might come back, that maybe she might love him.

It was a random day when everything settled. Half-way through his first year of middle school, he locked the door to the apartment and it smacked him in his face. The empty atmosphere, the baren home. The absence of a mother.

Eight years was a long time to be alone. School kept him occupied. Bakugo kept him occupied. Hero analysis kept him occupied.

Not enough to keep him from knowing though. He could never distract himself from the blatant, ugly truth.

He was alone.

No one would care if he suddenly stopped showing up to school. No one would care if he disappeared.

Izuku coped in his own ways.

He fed the stray animals using the leftover money. He chased hero fights like a storm chaser pursues a hurricane. He studied subjects and wandered the streets, helping people whenever the opportunity arose. He had worn clothes and beaten sneakers, not caring enough to use anything he saved to purchase anything nicer.

He didn't deserve anything better.

And- looking around at the room he was in now- he wondered if he deserved the Yamazawas' kindness. Wouldn't they all be better off if he went back to Dagobah? They wouldn't miss him.

Then there was the Nomu. Its lights, the flickering and the stench, to Izuku it exuded *wrongness* that he hated. It had been people once but they were mashed into one terrifying monster. A monster that Izuku killed.

Alone, he wouldn't have made it. Alone, he was nothing.

Deku, Bakugo's voice growled in the silence.

"Ooh! It's from the kanji in your name, right?" Izuku nodded at Uraraka, who smiled brightly. "It sorta sounds like 'dekiru', like, you can do it!"

"You are very bright."

"I want to learn from you."

"You may not believe you belong in your position, Midoriya, but I assure you, you are more than worthy of it."

"Based on all the notes you take, I think we could all improve our techniques if you gave us pointers."

Did he deserve their faith in him? All his life, he'd been told he was nothing and no one refuted it. No one helped him.

So why were they all so trusting of him? Why did they place their faith in *him,* a worthless nobody?

He didn't want to let them down.

Dekiru, Uraraka called him.

But what if he was just a Deku, in the end?

Izuku threw Todoroki over his shoulder, yelping when frost shot up his wrist. Todoroki was quick to melt it, apologizing and looking slightly embarrassed.

"You're definitely doing better," Izuku spoke once they stopped for water. "You learn quick."

"And you're far more adept than you let on."

He blushed, averting his eyes. "C-C'mon, let's try your quirk."

With a nod, Izuku waved to Cementoss, who gave them the go-ahead. Izuku sat down, cross-legged across from Todoroki, notebook in hand. Silently, he created frost over his right forearm, then, hesitating, he let flames rise from his left side. They wanted to see if he could produce ice (and fire, but Todoroki was against using ice on his right side) on his left side but for now, Izuku wanted to observe his quirk while it

was activated.

“Your body’s homeostasis is fascinating,” he muttered, jotting down notes as the boy across from him repeatedly frosted his arm. “Using both sides balances you out but would you freeze if you only used ice? Burn with only fire? And what about the creation itself? Flames are somewhat self-explanatory, the minor ignition taking place at your command, possibly taking in the needed elements to ignite. But your ice? Is hydration an issue for you if you use it too much? Does it take vapor from the air or from you or both? I don’t doubt fire’s also dehydrating-”

“Midoriya.”

Head snapping up, Izuku turned bright red. “S-Sorry! I didn’t mean to ramble!”

Brow knit in concentration, Todoroki glared at the fire licking at his skin. “I do require more water when I use my quirk but her ice mainly utilizes the surrounding vapors. His fire is particularly draining, though.”

“You keep saying that.”

“Saying what?”

“His fire, *her* ice,” He tilted his head. “Are you talking about your parents? I know Enchi-" Abruptly, his mouth clicked shut. He paled as Todoroki’s eyes went wide.

“En...chi?”

Throwing a glance at where Cementoss now hid behind his ungraded papers on his cement table, Izuku laughed nervously, clearing his throat. “Uh, well- your, your dad, T-Todoroki, he’s- he’s kinda not my favorite hero? I’m sorry. I-I shouldn’t have disrespected-”

“Why don’t you like him?” Todoroki’s quirk stopped and he lowered his arms, staring at Izuku with intensity.

He floundered under his gaze. “Endeavour’s known for his aggressive attitude, yeah? A lot of people like him for it.” Gripping the pencil, he hoped Todoroki still wanted to train after he said this. “But being ruthless isn’t always a good thing. His property damage rates are high and he doesn’t make controlled flames, he- he just *burns* things. Sometimes p-people. His villain mortality rates are abnormally high.

Excessive force, overly violent even when faced with petty crimes, he's quirkist, has no ability to comfort victims-"

Izuku fell silent, putting his hands in his lap.

"And the name?"

"It-It's something someone made up because they want to mock him and I mostly call him that in my head so it slipped out-"

"You don't like Endeavor." Not a question, a realization. He looked up, expected to see something scornful on his face, but was greeted with him looking pleased. "Then you understand why I don't wish to use his fire."

"I mean, I guess?" Fiddling with his notebook, he flipped to Todoroki's introduction page and showed it to him. "It's not his fire though. It's *your* quirk, *your* fire."

He scowled. "I-"

"Is your quirk Hell Flame?"

"No-"

"That's right, your quirk is Half-Cold Half-Hot. It's your fire, your ice. I don't care what kind of power your parents have, what you have now, it's *yours,* Todoroki."

After a tense minute of silence, heterochromatic eyes lifted to meet his. "I still don't want to use it." he confessed quietly.

Izuku nodded. "And that's your decision. But, and this might sound a little disingenuous coming from an orphan, you shouldn't let your parents define you or hold you back. Loving somebody is wonderful but only you can decide who you want to be."

"Midoriya." Izuku jumped, looking to the doors to find Aizawa standing by them. "Come on, time's up."

"O-Okay," He gathered his things and turned back to Todoroki as Aizawa led him out. "Think about what I said! Sorry for insulting your dad so much!"

In the car, Izuku put his head in his hands. "I just wanted to see his quirk but I ended up rambling about what a terrible hero his dad is-"

Hitoshi leaned over with intrigue. “Who?” He laughed, the traitor.

“Todoroki,” Aizawa grunted. Yamada whipped his head around and Hitoshi burst into a fit of laughter.

“You called Endeavor a terrible hero to Todoroki’s face?” Yamada gasped. “How’d he take that?”

“He wasn’t too upset about it, really.” Izuku shoved Hitoshi, who still had an amused smile on his face. “Actually, he seemed to agree with me, more than anything.”

Aizawa and Yamada stiffened but didn’t say anything.

Word spreading about his ‘quirkless’ status was both amusing and nostalgic. In the worst way possible, he would like to add.

On one hand, he baffled people and that was fantastic.

On the other hand, though-

The day had already been pretty crappy. People shoulder-checked him sneered at him, whispered in the hallways like he couldn’t hear them. But, he held out hope that no one would go farther than that. Hitoshi stuck to his side like glue, glaring the other students down, and the rest of his classmates weren’t the types to let people mistreat him. It made him giddy, reminding him that things were different at UA compared to Aldera, and maybe-

Izuku lurched forward, his body colliding with the stairs. His shoulder throbbed when he stood and the sharp pain in his head almost didn’t let him hear the laughter of whoever pushed him. His ankle pulsed painfully but he limped to his destination, determined not to let some asshole ruin a part of the day he enjoyed. The few students he passed on his way gave him bewildered glances but he could care less.

He entered the gym, waving to Todoroki, who froze upon seeing him. Todoroki rushed over, concern painting a frown on his usually impassive face.

“What happened to you?” he asked icily. “Why did you come here instead of to Recovery Girl?”

Izuku bristled, leaning heavily on his uninjured leg. “I wasn’t going to just not show up.”

Todoroki scowled. “You’re hurt. We can’t train.” Without warning, he swept Izuku’s legs out from under him and caught him. Lifting him and ignoring Izuku’s protests, he started walking back to the main building.

Unfortunately, they managed to run into Aizawa and Hitoshi on their way to one of the gyms. Izuku gave them a pathetic imitation of a wave, the pounding in his skull making it hard to do much besides hang limply in Todoroki’s arms. They were talking but Izuku ignored them, closing his eyes and resting his head on Todoroki’s shoulder. Wow, he was so *warm.*

Pressure filled his brain with cotton and nausea swirled in his stomach. Why couldn’t people just leave him alone? Jeez, people are such *bitches!* All Izuku wanted to do was be nice and have a good time but noooo, they had to be like “I’m a discriminatory little baby, who wants to prove I have a big dick, so Imma push *you* down the stairs.”

Todoroki tensed and Izuku opened his eyes, craning his neck to squint up at his friend. “Wassa matta witchu?” he slurred, deciding to ignore the fact that his friend was blurry as hell. Todoroki said something that he didn’t understand and Izuku squinted harder.

Suddenly, Todoroki was trying to move away from him. Izuku’s hands shot out in fright, grabbing onto his retracting arms. No no no, stay, stay, please, what did he do wrong-

Something soft pressed into the back of his exposed neck and Izuku hurled himself away from it, a screech tearing out of his throat. His body collided with Todoroki’s and then he was being held down. Panic surged, overtaking everything else in his mind and he thrashed, attempting to free himself.

The soft thing came back and the pain, pressure, panic, everything receded until he was left with nothing but exhaustion.

A few minutes later, Izuku was back in his right mind and sat awkwardly in the hospital bed as his three companions stared at him.

“Who pushed you down the stairs?” Todoroki asked, breaking the silence.

Izuku tensed. “How-”

“You were muttering,” Hitoshi said.

Izuku rubbed his arms, cold without Todoroki wrapped around him. “I don’t know. I *don’t,”* Izuku added, snapping at Aizawa’s unimpressed face. “They came from behind me, so I never saw them.”

“The cameras definitely saw them,” Aizawa muttered, eyes narrowing. He stalked towards the exit. “I’m calling Nedzu.”

With only the three of them left in the room, Izuku twiddled his thumbs and avoided eye contact.

“I hope whoever did this gets what’s coming to them,” Hitoshi said bitterly.

“All he did was push me down the stairs,” Izuku said, more to himself than them.

His words only served to rile Hitoshi further. “You had a swollen ankle and a head injury!”

“People have gotten away with worse.”

Todoroki was the one to speak up this time, his voice angered and resolute. “Just because people have hurt you in the past does not make it okay for people to hurt you now.”

“Yes, thank you, Todoroki,” Hitoshi said choppily. “And I told you, Izuku. UA won’t let people get away with this sort of shit.”

It hit Izuku then, that people were looking after him. People that weren’t the Hatsumes. People that, by all means, don’t need to help him.

“Oh,” was all he could say, tears building in his eyes.

In the locker room, his underclothes saved him from having to reveal his new scars as he changed. Sliding into the uniform, he looked down at the clothes with a small smile. Izuku made it. Here he was, at UA, competing in the Sports Festival. The class walked into the waiting room, chatter breaking out.

“Midoriya,” Todoroki took a place at Izuku’s side, unintentionally shielding him from the rest of their classmates. “Objectively, I’m

stronger than you.”

In return, Izuku offered an amused raise of his eyebrow. “I’m pretty sure half the people in this room are objectively stronger than me with their quirks taken into account.”

“You are a formidable opponent, one who I will defeat to earn my win.”

“I’m that impressive?”

“You’re more than impressive,” he said easily. “That’s why I’m going to beat you.”

Izuku couldn’t help the grin that tugged at his lips. “Then you know I won’t go down easy.” He faced Todoroki fully, looking up at him, eyes gleaming with determination. “You’re my friend, Todoroki.” The shocked but pleased look that flashed across his face egged him on. “So, let’s give our all, yeah?”

“Go beyond,” Todoroki murmured, his soft expression melting into passion.

Izuku nodded, listening as Yamada called for their class, the crowd exploding with sound. “Plus Ultra.”

Chapter End Notes

It is I, the writer, and I have come to tell you-
Thank you for reading! I appreciate your feedback!

Turning Heads

Chapter Notes

> Short chapter, i know, BUT-
> it's the name reveal!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Aizawa informed him that he would be doing a speech at the beginning of the Festival, it would have been an understatement to say that Izuku freaked out. It had been during dinner and Izuku nearly died choking on his food after he processed the statement, Yamada screeching in the background, “You’ve killed him!” as Hitoshi hit his back repeatedly.

Soon, after the initial shock faded, he reluctantly agreed to the idea.

But now that he was there, standing on a stage with the whole world staring at him, Izuku’s hands trembled. People always ignored him, out of fear or hate, or no reason at all. It was easy to go unnoticed but now he was forced into the light, where any and all could see him.

Privately, he wondered if his mother and father were watching.

Secretly, he wondered if Shigaraki was watching.

Publicly, he looked out to the audience and spoke, his voice quieting the crowd’s volume as he spoke.

“I know you’re all entertained by what you’ve been told about Class 1-A but don’t disregard the other students and their efforts that earned them a place at UA. Every student here is fighting to win and we all have a chance to.” He kept his expression neutral, lifting his chin.

“You’re watching because you want to see something flashy and full of powerful quirks. But I’m going to tell you something. Powerful quirks are more than what people make them out to be.” And less. He thought of Bakugo, of *Kacchan,* who kept being told he would go farther than the rest of them. Powerful quirks may give an advantage but they do not make anyone worth more than those without them.

“Sometimes they aren’t easy to spot and sometimes they aren’t favorable.” He thought of Hitoshi and Aizawa and of himself, with quirks, quirks that made them powerful, but that was never how the

world saw them. “I think every one of us is powerful in our way, no matter our quirk, no matter which course we ended up in. Quirks aren’t everything and they don’t define the user.” He wanted people to hear him for once. People needed to have this said, even if there were some who did not want to listen.

Izuku glanced up at the audience, lifting his arm to gesture at the crowd of students behind him. “There are a lotta kids out here ready to fight for something so keep your eyes open and remember,” Dropping his arm, Izuku turned his forest-fire gaze onto the camera, one end of his mouth pulling up into a partial grin.

“Appearances are deceiving.”

No one spoke as he walked back to the gathered students. They parted for him, giving him a path directly to where his friends awaited. Mei grinned like the world was burning and he lit the first match, pride radiating off of her. Hitoshi smirked a lazy, calm thing, a signal of approval, a promise to prove Izuku’s point. Kirishima and Uraraka waved, smiling brightly and giving him thumbs up. Tsuyu’s face displayed a small smile. Yaoyorozu had an odd grin, goofy almost as she stared at him. Iida gaped, his jaw hanging.

Todoroki stood off to the side but they caught each other’s gaze and the duel-haired boy nodded.

Izuku allowed himself a tiny grin. He had *friends.* Take that, haters.

Midnight bounced back from the suffocating silence with grace. She swayed her hips and swung her whip, calling for the beginning of the Festival, and eyes easily turned to her for some sort of distraction.

For the Festival, Izuku was allowed his support gear only for the second round. He wasn’t a Support course student like Mei, and apparently the judges for the Festival thought he was already pushing it wearing his protective clothing. Gadgets and galore would sit unused in the workshop, but his shoes and gun would do him justice.

They underwent a few upgrades since he had last used them in the Entrance exam. His shoes were lighter, looking more like actual shoes now. The weight limit increased significantly and they could shoot him around in the air instead of semi-decent hovering. Maneuvers should be easier too.

The Nomu’s lightning-fast blows flashed in his mind and he shivered.

The magazine for his gun could safely hold more ammunition now. Said ammo had been turned into pellets for faster, harder, more annoying hits. Before, there was Stick, Explode, and Gas. (Mei badgered him constantly about naming things so terribly) Now, he had those with the addition of Confetti and Light. (Mei tried to hit him upside the head for only coming up with those)

Confetti, on impact, exploded from its compressed state into a barrage of tiny snippets of green confetti. It doesn't sound like much, but being hit and then having small pieces of colorful paper fly in one's face cost them time. Light was composed of several substances, like Explode and Stick, reacting to sudden bursts of heat. When hitting the target, the core within, akin to how Confetti's burst relies on the amount the core has been heated, combusts. It creates a reaction from the surrounding docile chemicals, conjuring a brief, but bright, flash that will dissipate as the components lose energy.

The reverse for Stick would hang in his utility belt whenever he got the chance to wear his costume again but if- no, when he made it to the Second Round, Midnight and Cementoss would each take some for safety purposes.

A screen appeared behind Midnight, the teacher saying something about "bringing the pain". Izuku turned to the suspiciously narrow corridor.

"The wheel is for show," he muttered, Mei turning her attention fully on him. His other friends caught on almost immediately. "They already know where they want us to go but they need a performance for the crowd. I think we all caught a glimpse of the wide path when we entered. It's a race. Obstacle? This is the opening act, they need something big that'll set the standard for who to look out for. Students are going to get caught in the bottleneck of the hall. First obstacle, maybe."

"Obstacle Race!" Midnight declared a moment later, explaining the rules.

He awkwardly shot finger guns at his friends, who were staring at him with half-surprised expressions.

"What about the other Rounds?" Hitoshi asked slyly.

Choosing to simply go with it, Izuku rubbed his thumb over his index finger in thought. "From what I've seen, they have people stand out, then make people form teams. Second Round will likely revolve

around team efforts and for Three… Well, Three will be one-on-one matches to decide the overall winner."

Before anyone could say something else, a buzzer rang and everyone barreled towards the passageway. It reminded Izuku of the second day of school when the alarm caused everyone to panic.

He would not be caught in the crowd this time.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed.

Looks between Endeavor and an on fire garbage can

Chapter Notes

21k hits-- guys, thank you so much

!Panic attack and bad thoughts warning! Mentions of past abuse

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He heaved in a prideful gulp of air, even as people threw him looks. People apparently hadn't expected him to have the guts to live up to his words. Placing first earned him a ten million point target painted on his back but his friends had not even acted surprised by his placement. Mei practically tackled him after she finished the race and Izuku felt gratified that all his friends knew that he could pull off such a feat.

Mei, Hitoshi, and Uraraka ended up being in his team. Iida and Yaoyorozu grouped with Todoroki and Kaminari. Kirishima and Tsuyu found their own teams. He wished them luck because Kirishima had Bakugo and Tsuyu had to deal with Mineta. Izuku glanced over to their respective teams and found he didn't have to worry. Kirishima's personality was Bakugo-redundant and Shoji stared down Mineta like he was ready to drop him the moment he did something out of line.

Before the Festival, Izuku realized that the sensory portion of his quirk could turn off. A godsend honestly, because he would not have been able to handle all the lights and smells coming from the crowd. He managed to make it to the kitchen before realizing he couldn't see Hitoshi's aura and freaked out, consequently freaking out Hitoshi and Yamada. Izuku explained the situation to them as he tried to call upon his quirk and proceeded to activate his Sight again. He sighed in relief, then panicked when his quirked senses disappeared once more.

Izuku had to purposefully keep his concentration on powering his quirk, and it messed with his head. It had been startling, and slightly worrying because Izuku had been trying *not* to bottle up his quirk, so doing it unintentionally scared him. Eventually, pain built up in the same way it always did when he used his quirk and Aizawa took him to UA's quirk specialist after his nose started bleeding.

The specialist explained the process as "settling". His quirk was

making up for lost development when he was younger and settling now that Izuku had given it time to grow and develop. His quirk had multiple parts, one wholly physical, the other two sensory. It had been constantly on because his quirk expected to be shut down immediately and stayed vigilant until it was able to settle. When he asked why he hadn't fallen over from quirk exhaustion, she shrugged and tapped her clipboard with her pen. "You pushed down your quirk for ten years and stunted its growth. I suspect this sensory addition to your quirk would have appeared much sooner, had you felt comfortable allowing yourself to relax. Your quirk is passive, so when you released control, your quirk put together a reserve and bottled up some power for the next step. It must have decided you were ready and evolved. The reserve finally ran out, shutting off without you suppressing it."

Izuku was just glad he didn't have to breathe in anxiety-air again.

Hitoshi begrudgingly accepted the role of rider, being the lightest of the four of them, shouldering the jetpack Mei dumped on him. Mei was their horse, built like a brick wall and tenacious enough in her venture to show off her products to have no qualms leading them around like a madwoman on a warpath. Uraraka lightened each of them and their inventions slightly, taking the back with Izuku. Izuku would be a whisper in their ears, telling them about their enemies, gun at the ready, maintaining their offense while the rest of his teammates focussed on protecting the headband.

They stayed put while the other teams ran at them, waiting.

"Now!" Izuku shouted. Their shoes and jetpack threw them into the air, leaving teams to stagger to a halt before they could crash into other teams. In the air, Izuku turned off the safety on his gun and aimed. Stick pellets shot down, sending a few teams scrambling while others didn't notice. The substance lined an end of the field, expanding under the sun's warmth.

"WHOA, what is that?" Yamada said in feigned ignorance. *"Midoriya just shot something onto the ground and it's GROWING! Other competitors might want to steer clear of that!"*

And, just like that, people who weren't gunning for the ten million immediately began herding their targets in that direction.

"Bakugo's incoming!" Uraraka warned as the sound of explosions met his ears.

"DEKU!" Bakugo screeched, hands lit up as he shot through the air.

The swivelled mid-air, giving Izuku the chance to aim the gun right at the explosive blonde. His red eyes widened as he faced the barrel of his gun.

Bang, Izuku thought.

A single pellet of Stick found home in the center of his chest, the boy exploding it with his hand, only making it worse. Rescued by his team when he fell, Izuku observed the way the substance crawled further around Bakugo, then back to where Midnight and Cementoss held the solution.

“Vines!” Hitoshi warned, just in time for them to move out of the way.

Ibara Shiozaki, quirk: Vines. They grow from her head at a fast rate from her scalp. The vines are produced at a seemingly infinite amount, meaning endurance doesn’t work on her. Controlled like Aizawa’s capture weapon but be wary of the thorns.

Ibara attacked again from a safe distance, Izuku’s team avoiding the hit again when he used Explode to combat the vines.

In large quantities, they’re an amazing shield and tough to break through. Izuku fired again. *But being as expended as they are, she’s forced to lower the amount, making them vulnerable to being cut or-* Explosion combusted against the vines- *exploded.*

The assault stopped suddenly, *too* suddenly, and they peered down, Mei laughing outright when they caught sight of Ibara’s team, stuck in the Stick-covered side of the field.

“We gotta go down,” Mei said, loud enough for only the three of them to hear. “We’re reaching capacity.”

And go down they did. All of them turned off their machinery and Uraraka returned some of their gravity, sending them plummeting.

“Did team Yamazawa have a malfunction?” Yamada asked, sounding a bit panicked. *“What’s-”*

Their gadgets came to life, Uraraka taking their weight with her quirk, and dirt exploded around them.

“What a LANDING!”

Todoroki’s team faced them when the dust settled. Ice encased them,

trapping teams in. “We’ll be taking that,” Todoroki stated.

Hitoshi snickered. “Try it,” he dared.

“Kaminari!” An insulation blanket *poofed* into existence, sparkles from Yaoyorozu’s quirk shimmering as it covered them.

Nope.

They jumped back into the air, but the electricity tackled their bodies anyways. *Indiscriminate Shock,* a kamikaze move that did not bode well for them. Hitoshi was the only one not too out of shape, completely off the ground, and only had them as conductors for the lightning, but he could not do much without revealing his quirk, something they agreed to only use as a last resort.

“You’ll want to keep its functions a secret,” Izuku suggested. “The announcers never explain a quirk because we’re training to be heroes, and it’d be bad if every villain knew what was coming from a mile off, but you should keep the requirements for activation to yourself.”

“Yeah,” Hitoshi agreed. “I’ve been thinking about that, too. I’ll be done for if my quirk gets figured out too early.”

“Hey now, you’ve come far from the first day we started doing offensive moves.”

“Doesn’t mean I’m not still shit.”

“Just because you can’t beat me does not mean you’re terrible,”

“Oh, I know,” Hitoshi said. “You’re a demon on the mat. Where’d you even learn that stuff?”

“I have two mothers,” he replied. “They’re the real *demons.”*

Taking advantage of their disposition, their headband was snatched, Iida pulling a power move out of nowhere. Their time constraint was running to its end. If they were going to win, they had to do it soon.

Now.

“Iida and Kaminari are both pretty useless,” Izuku informed his team. “Todoroki won’t use his left side, Yaoyorozu’s got this right, but avoiding her won’t be a trouble.

“Let’s kick his ass!” Uraraka intoned enthusiastically.

With two teammates slowing them down, an ice wall at their backs, and a vulnerable side, it didn't take much to chase them into a corner, even with the aftershocks of Kaminari's quirk hindering them.

Yamada announced the ten-second countdown and they raced forward. Todoroki lifted his arm to defend against Hitoshi's grab, forgoing the use of his fire. Passing him on his left side, Izuku shot his arm with the last of Stick and Hitoshi's hand shot out to take the headband. His eyes met with Todoroki's as they continued to barrel past them. Stick puffed and grew across his arm as Izuku's team crashed into the ice.

"AAAND WE HAVE OUR WINNERS!"

The euphoria of their victory vanished when he caught a glimpse of Todoroki. The boy was glaring at Izuku in a way he hadn't since the Battle Training.

"Oi, what's his deal?" Hitoshi grumbled, coming to stand beside him. Glaring back because he knew Izuku wouldn't, he said, "C'mon, Izuku, you don't have to deal with any sore losers."

But he *wanted* to. Todoroki… he agreed that the two of them were friends. Did, did he jeopardize that? But they promised to give their all! Why would he fault him for-

Stick puffed and grew across his arm.

Stick only expanded in response to heat.

After prying him out of Mei and Hitoshi's skeptical hands, he stood with Todoroki in the tunnel. The silence weighed heavily on him as his maybe-friend scowled at him. The cold radiating off of him suddenly reminded him of his old apartment, Todoroki's frigid gaze pinning him down. He looked away, unable to keep this staring contest going, and pressed himself into the wall.

"T-Todoro-oki-"

"I was overwhelmed," Izuku clamped his mouth shut. "You made me

break a promise I made to myself a long time ago."

Izuku glanced at his left arm, the discoloration in his skin from the bruise where Stick first hit him and the green food dye. Todoroki had such an advantage at his disposal, yet he only used it once it was too late. "You exploited my left side repeatedly, you *shot* me-" He lifted his arm to stare at the mess of color. "You're an analyst, Midoriya. You knew how to beat me. And your aura…" Looking up again, there was something curious in his gaze. "I've never seen you look like that before."

Okay, this was becoming incredibly confusing. "Todoroki, what do you mean?"

"You overwhelmed me. I could see it in your eyes, I could feel the *power* you held." His head tilted like he was trying to figure something out. "At first glance, you don't look powerful. In fact, you look quite average. But that's what you said, isn't it? 'Appearances are deceiving'?"

Before he could answer, Todoroki turned his gaze back to his left forearm. "You know that I hate my old man. But even knowing that he's a hot-headed hero doesn't explain the full *why*. My father is Endeavor. He is the Number Two hero, but being Number One has always been his goal. It's unreachable, with All Might drawing a distinct line between himself and the other heroes. So he decided to find an alternative route."

Goosebumps rose over Izuku's skin, remembering vague remarks about training, remembering the icy way he spoke of his fire and his father.

"Have you ever heard of quirk marriages?"

Oh. *Oh no.*

Buzzing filled his ears as Todoroki explained his origins, his childhood, the very reason he was *born.* Izuku wanted to deny it. He needed this to be wrong but the worst of it was that he believed his friend. Todoroki would not lie about something so serious.

"She called my left side *unbearable"* Todoroki said distantly, lifting his hand to cover the scar on his face. "as she poured boiling water over my face."

Hisashi's burning flames warmed his skin in phantom waves,

memories of his mother's terrified eyes flashing.

His next words slipped out before he could stop them, coming out quietly. "What is it with fire quirks and abusive fathers?"

Todoroki's head snapped up, wide-eyed. "I thought you said-"

"I am an orphan," Izuku confirmed. "I just… I wasn't always."

There was no answer for a moment, just the two of them looking into the other's eyes and finding understanding.

Finally, Todoroki spoke. "You… before, you said that you understood my choice to never use his fire."

Izuku answered the unspoken question. "I do." His friend relaxed, but he tensed when Izuku held his gaze. "I do, Todoroki, but we both know that the world is unkind. There will come a day when you'll have to make a choice. Being a hero means doing your best to save the lives of everyone around you and using half your strength won't do you any favors." Todoroki opened his mouth to retort but he didn't stop. "One day you'll have to choose between your hatred for your father and your willingness to save lives because I promise you now, Todoroki, that day *will* come.

"And how many times do I have to say it?" Izuku asked. "It's *your* power. No one else's."

Todoroki wouldn't speak to him after that. They walked away from each other, both of them with something to think about.

When he bumped into someone, he muttered an apology, not even glancing up, and continued walking. Or, he tried to. A hand gripping his shoulder stopped him, freezing the blood in his veins at the sudden contact.

Ripping himself out of the person's grasp, he came face to face with Endeavor.

"You." He sneered, his cobalt gaze narrowing in simpering anger. "How did a runt like you beat my masterpiece? Shouto should have crushed you like the worthless speck you are."

My masterpiece.

"You haven't even used a quirk yet," Endeavwhore continued. "Using support gear to make yourself powerful. *Pathetic.* I bet you have a weak quirk, don't you? That's why you said all that shit about all the students having a chance." The flame *hero* taunted. "From where I stand, some useless shit like you would be better off without a quirk, then you wouldn't be able to take the spot of a more deserving candidate."

He was close now. Close enough for his fire-facial hair to heat Izuku's face uncomfortably. "My Shouto will have no trouble putting you in your place, whether or not he decides to use my fire."

And Izuku, absolutely disregarding any sense of self-worth, laughed. It was more of a light chortle, one that was distinctively on edge with nerves, but it was definitely and sound that both of them were surprised by. Not one to lose his momentum, he took advantage of Endeavwhore's bafflement.

"It's his fire," Izuku growled uncharacteristically. *"His,* you got that?"

Having said his piece, Izuku walked around the corner as calmly as he could manage. Then the next. And the next. He walked until he reached the waiting room for the first match. His match. Against a boy named Tetsutetsu.

The second the door closed, Izuku's hands started shaking, his chest tightening.

The competition already forced him into touching people. His self-worth was already a fragile, degraded thing.

Then there was Todoroki. His friend. His sparring mate. To find out he had gone through so much, was *still* going through so much, it, it- Izuku slid down against the nearest wall.

Meeting the bastard himself had not been an event Izuku accounted for at all. Mind still whirring, comprehending the past Todoroki revealed, the unknown hand itself on his shoulder nearly sent him over the edge. Looking up to see Todoroki's abuser, blue eyes ironically icy as he glared, did not help matters. Hearing him talk, *oh,* Izuku would have fun getting that out of his head. Runt, worthless, shit, useless, speck, pathetic, undeserving, it wasn't like Endeavwhore had been original in his insults.

But the *heat.*

God, his skin itched with the faded burns, the lasting warmth that never gave him comfort. Izuku's memory had always been one to retain and never let go. This wasn't always the best thing. Not when he could remember, so clearly, what Hisashi's scowl looked like as smoke drifted carelessly out of his snarling mouth. Not when his mother's fear translated into his own. Not when his words reminded him so strongly of what his mother said to him during the months after his quirks manifested before she left him.

"You be better off without that horrible quirk!"

Yeah, because he was treated *so* much better when people thought he was quirkless.

C'mon, stupid brain, give me seratonin or something, Izuku requested futilely, pulling his knees up to his chest, attempting to control his breathing.

Faint, but there, something happened outside of the safety of his arms wrapped over his head. He elected to ignore it, focussing solely on regulating his strained breathing. Izuku could stave off a panic attack. He could do it. He couldn't be stuck in here.

Think happy thoughts, he practically begged, ransacking his brain for anything to calm him down.

Inko's warm embrace, her smile-

Inko's rough hands as she shoved him away, her face pinched in a glare.

Tomura's dry laugh, their friendship-

Shigaraki staring at him with betrayal, ordering the Nomu to hurt him.

Alright, why the *hell* were those two the first who came to mind? Those were the worst people he had a relationship with by far.

Kacchan's arm slung around his narrow shoulders, his fist raised in the air, proclaiming that they would be the best hero duo-

Bakugo's hand burning his skin, mouth pulled into a dangerous grin, daring Izuku to ever think *about becoming a hero.*

Not *him,* either!

Mei's eyes lighting up as he exploded the first prototype for Explosion. Ayumi crying, so surprised and *happy,* when he turned up the second time at the Hatsume residence and could hold a conversation with her without Mei or Mitsu playing translator. Mitsu cackling when he showed her the blueprints for his support shoes, fire burning in her golden gaze.

Uraraka's shout of excitement when he entered 1-A's classroom, her willingness to be his friend.

Meeting Aizawa for the first time, holding an actual conversation with *Eraserhead-*

Coming out of his trance, Aizawa trapped by his quirk, a pounding headache-

Stop it!

Yamada rambling about their cats to calm him down, humming softly when he cooked, then belting out lyrics when his favorite parts came along.

Hitoshi cooing at the cats, his easy smirk as he commented dryly on Hana's antics. His not-so-subtle death glare directed at anybody who acted rudely to him before and especially after people started thinking he was quirkless. The complete acceptance he was faced with when he explained his quirk.

"You're never getting rid of me now," Hitoshi sniffed after explaining his own quirk. "You know that, right?"

Something warm bloomed in his chest and he found himself awake, back in the waiting room.

Yamada's muffled voice alerted him to the fact that his match was about to start.

Shit.

Izuku huffed, winded, standing on his end of the field. He barely made it in time for his introduction, and now Tetsutetsu grinned from his end, cracking his knuckles.

“Y’know, you’re pretty smart, for a quirkless kid,” Tetsutetsu said backhandedly. “But that brain of yours won’t help you here.”

Izuku almost laughed at the absurdity of that statement. His would help him very much, thank you. He was hyped from the adrenaline coursing through his system, mind picking apart his opponent’s quirk with practiced thought.

The buzzer sounded and they both shot forward.

Tetsutetsu Tetsutetsu, quirk: Steel. Izuku dodged the boy’s attempted hits with ease. *It’s the same as Kirishima’s, in essence.* Smooth, shiny metal glinted in the sunlight as Izuku kept drawing him in only to back away. *But his skin doesn’t become jagged or sharp.* A metallic fist missed his head, knuckles sharp. With a quick glance at his joints, it was clear that those were his opponent’s double-edged sword. *His body doesn’t harden like Kirishima’s, his joints jut out and create razor-like spikes. There’s a small patch of skin underneath the exterior that remains soft to maintain mobility.*

Doesn’t make him fast, though, Izuku thought as the boy charged, becoming increasingly frustrated with Izuku’s continuous evasion. His quirk was great for defense, offense, too, in other circumstances, but he was fighting Izuku.

Izuku, who did not allow him to land a single hit with those mini shivs on his fists. Izuku, who caught on the moment those shivs started shrinking from the use Tetsutetsu put in to try and hit Izuku hard enough to take him out.

Because, at this point, everyone knew that Izuku had the upper hand here. The crowd had almost stopped cheering at this point, it was just Yamada’s narration of every move they made.

His opponent left himself open for a moment, those sharp edges short enough for that patch of skin to be visible without a crane of his head.

It was enough.

His hand met flesh and Tetsutetsu faltered. Exhausted from the energy he expended during his attempted assault, his own quirk still active and slowing him down, it was entirely too easy for Izuku to go after those vulnerable patches of skin.

After Izuku hit his knee, it was over.

Tetsutetsu fell onto his knees and Izuku pushed him down. Midnight counted down, then declared Izuku the winner.

The crowd was cheering for him, he realized. This was not uneasy silence but *cheering.*

He offered his hand to Tetsutetsu, who took it, giving him a narrow-eyed once over.

“That was so manly,” he huffed, letting his skin turn back to normal. “How did you move that fast, man?”

Izuku thought back to the many times he dodged one of Mei’s inventions gone ballistic, the number of times he narrowly jumped out of the way of a collapsing trash pile at Dagobah or saved Mei from one. “Practice,” he shrugged.

He needed Mei. Or Hitoshi.

The moment he was alone, he crashed. Everything rushed back to put him through hell. He should have known that he got off too easily.

Finding Mei would be best. She experienced enough of his attacks to know how to calm him down and comfort him. Hitoshi could use his quirk and he knew how to keep Izuku focus on something other than whatever the hell his head wanted him to.

But the hallways were empty. Silent, save for his harsh breaths and stumbling steps.

Then he crashed into Iida.

Fucking *perfect.*

His knees buckled and he let himself fall. The match had taken a lot out of him, too, and it was catching up with him.

“-idoriya?”

“Hn,” he whimpered. Everything felt raw and exposed and he didn’t want *anyone to see him like this-*

“Midoriya, I-I,” He knelt down in front of Izuku, hands hovering like he wanted to do something but knew not to touch him. “F-Focus on

breathing. Follow me. In, one, two, three. Out, one, two, three…"

They continued on like that; Izuku failing to catch his breath and Iida reassuring him until Izuku took one of Iida's shaking hands with his own and dropped his head against the wall. Iida looked down, surprised, and Izuku offered him a grateful squeeze when they met eyes.

"Are you a-alright?" Iida stammered nervously.

Izuku nodded, his throat feeling clogged. He lifted his hands. *"Do you know sign?"*

"Yes," Iida responded immediately. *"It was an elective at my middle school."*

"Would it be okay for me to take you somewhere?" Iida glanced around the empty hallway. "I don't feel comfortable simply leaving you here."

"Isn't your match soon?"

He nodded sharply. "Yes, but if I could just ensure you some form of shelter-"

"I'll call someone," Izuku signed, his hands becoming heavier by the second. *"Go to your match."*

He won the staring contest Iida started and the boy pursed his lips. "...I've seen your phone, do you even have it with you?"

A quick pat of his pockets revealed that, no, he did not have his phone.

"Here," Iida handed him his phone, unlocked and ready for use. "When they're on the phone, I'll leave."

Izuku dialed the number. It rang for a moment. He put the phone on speaker.

"Who is this?"

Iida jolted at Aizawa's grumpy voice. Izuku gestured with the phone and he startled again.

"S-Sensei!" He shouted.

“Iida,” Aizawa said, deadpan, not even questioning how he knew his number. *“You called. Say something.”*

Glancing back to the sign for confirmation, he said, “I’m with Midoriya, sir, in hallway J3. I’ve just talked him down from a panic attack and I am hesitant to leave him alone.”

“I’m on my way,”

And, sure enough, Aizawa turned down the hallway not two minutes later. Iida bowed and left, hurrying to his match.

Aizawa, with his permission, picked him up carefully with his capture weapon and took him to a lounge-esque room, letting silence settle between them until Izuku curled into the corner of a couch.

“Are you non-verbal?” At Izuku’s nod, he sat on the other side of the couch. “Are you still panicking or uncomfortable?” Izuku shook his head. “Are you tired?”

He nodded. “Then rest, problem child. Zashi will stall if you aren’t ready by the time the next round comes.”

Elsewhere, Hitoshi and Mei cornered Todoroki.

“What’d you say, ya prick?” Mei poked him in the chest. “He looked *terrible* when he walked out! Like he was about to have a panic attack!”

Before Hitoshi could say his piece or Todoroki could explain, his phone buzzed.

“Yeah?” Hitoshi grumbled, curious as to why his dad would call.

“I’ve got Izuku down in a lounge area by the J halls, he’s not doing so good.”

“Is he alright? What happened?” Mei whipped around from where she glowered at Todoroki menacingly, her golden eyes zooming in on him.

“Speaker,” Mei commanded. “Put it on speaker!”

“Is Mei the only other person around?”

They glanced at Todoroki. “We’ve got the candy cane boy here, too,”

“Todoroki?” Both of them almost laughed at how easily his monotone voice said it. *“I don’t know what happened. He’s non-verbal and when Iida found him, he had been in the middle of a panic attack.”*

Sobered by his words, the mood dropped.

“Iida?” Hitoshi questioned, thinking of his brash and loud attitude.

“Handled the situation surprisingly well,” Shouta said approvingly. *“He’s done research.”*

Hitoshi pushed down a smile. Good to know Mr. Robot could learn from his mistakes.

“Lounge by the J halls, you said?”

“Yes,”

Mei was already dragging him down the hall. “On the way,” he informed Shouta.

Chapter End Notes

https://discord.gg/C5G7GJC
Join the discord!

I love reading comments, I hope you enjoyed reading

Iida did you think I'd leave you hanging? We support Growth

Also I may have changed up the bracket sooo

Mido v. Testu

Iida v. Momo

Sero v. Aoyoama

Todoroki v. Ashido

Kiri v. Uraraka

Ibara v. Tokoyami

Kaminari v. Bakugo

Mei v. Hitoshi

Fight on, little heroes

Chapter Notes

> k, so heads up, I may or may not be rewriting the entirety of this story. Not like plot wise, but the writing will be better and more things will be added and I just wanted to say something because I feel like my writing got a bit crappy and I want to fix that
>
> AAAnd we have some fights and endeavor being an asshole
>
> you may or may not notice discrepancies in how the kiddos think of their teachers and I did that on purpose, to clarify

Tomura shifted in his chair, an electronic hue glowing softly in the dark room.

The clothes Izuku wore, the ones that blocked his quirk, almost covered the scar that crawled up his neck. They hid both of his arms entirely, but Tomura knew that both of them were marred with scar tissue.
One scar that led Izuku to him and the other, that drove him away.

One that you *gave him.*

He scratched his neck, appreciating the sting, and watched Izuku walk onto the platform for his speech. He grinned at the proclamation that Izuku made the highest score in the entrance exam. The slight shake of his hands stopped when he opened his mouth.

The spark of hope that ignited at the USJ was fanned as he spoke, reviving the dying embers he thought he snuffed out. He chuckled as Izuku gave the audience a smirk, truth ringing with every syllable, and walked away from the microphone, leaving them all stunned.

Envy curled in his gut when the camera panned to Izuku reaching a group of brats as they greeted him, all of them looking proud.

Why can't that be me? *He's* my *friend.*

In the first round, Izuku didn't get much screen time until the last portion, which made Tomura seethe. Why weren't they paying more attention to him? He could care less about two powerhouses with vendettas, where was *Izuku?*

Flying through the air on a piece of metal, apparently.

Present Mic screamed about last-minute snatches and turnarounds as Izuku surpassed the other two easily. Tomura laughed- *laughed*- when he used them to propel himself again. Pride swelled in his chest as the camera showed Izuku, out of breath, with the beginnings of a smile forming on his face. He *won.*

Of course, he won, his brain chided. *This is* Izuku.

Izuku who always told him to never give up on a level. Izuku who never failed to cheer him up. Izuku, who comforted him and brought life to his unchanging schedule in the days he was present. Izuku, who touched him with kindness radiating off of him, the only loving human contact he could remember-

Izuku's face contorted in agony, a stifled shriek piercing through the air as his shoulder disintegrated.

In the second round, Tomura gripped the edge of the desk at the sight of Izuku teaming up with a few other brats. Brats who were entirely too familiar with him. The purple-haired one said something and Izuku laughed, lighting up the world.

During the match, a blonde boy flew towards him, malice written on his face and Tomura watched, satisfaction and mirth coursing through him as Izuku's team pivoted in the air, letting him shoot the boy down. Vines came at them next, which they destroyed and outmaneuvered. Next was Endeavor's kid, who stole the headband only to have it redeemed in the last moments.

Intermission hit and Tomura sat back in his chair.

"Sensei," he said thoughtfully, an idea forming in his head.

A screen lit up, static hissing in the quiet room. "Yes, Tomura?"

"Is Izuku useful now?"

Sensei paused. "Izuku," he pondered, something amused drifting in his distorted tone. "He certainly could be."

Tenya faced Yaoyorozu on the field, determined to win.

“Did you see Midoriya?”

Her question startled him, her voice masked to the audience by Kayama-sensei and Yamada-sensei. It made sense though, with how their friend hurried out looking less than put together. Her worry was only further gratified by his concerning encounter with Midoriya barely a few minutes ago.

He nodded. “Aizawa-sensei is with him,”

That only served to confuse her, evident in the way her brows furrowed, but there was no time to talk further on the subject. Kayama-sensei signaled the beginning of their match and Tenya shot forward, fast, but it had nothing on the Recipro Burst he revealed in the last round.

Yaoyorozu was too intelligent, too quick to be immediately pushed out, and as such using it would lead to a loss before a minute could pass. As suspected, his opponent blocked his first attack, showcasing the same quick wits as she did in the previous round.

Briefly, he thought that maybe he was being too brutal with his onslaught, that maybe Yoayorozu-

She slammed a metal shield into his shin as he aimed a kick, pain exploding on impact, and banished all thoughts that his opponent was anything other than a strong, clever young woman who could absolutely trouse him if he didn’t give his all.

With a burst of energy, he kicked, and into their flurry of exchanged blows and parries, something abruptly slammed into his chest, knocking the breath out of his chest. Body slamming into the ground, he scrambled for purchase, only to be pinned and put into a triangle hold.

“Yield!” She commanded, tightening her thighs around his arm painfully.

Refusing, he commanded power to his legs and bridged his hips, sending them both sprawling, and broke out of her grip.

“Recipro BURST!”

Tenya flew forward, slamming into his winded opponent, and pushed her out of the boundaries. His engines sputtered and coughed exhaust, stalling and leaving him weak on his feet. Yaoyorozu fell back, inertia

and gravity forcing her backward, an expression of shock painting her features. His brain filtered her immodesty, but he had been having class with her and several other girls, dressed in their tight or revealing hero uniforms, for too long to be left flustered by her exposed stomach and cleavage. It would be unbecoming of him to ogle his opponent, not to mention impolite.

He helped her off the ground, Yamada-sensei praising their sportsmanship. “Are you alright?” he inquired, the several bruises she gave him throbbing.

“Yeah,” she gasped, a sheen of sweat glistening on her skin. “You’re a formidable opponent, Iida.”

He nodded firmly. “As are you, Yaoyorozu!” They walked to one of the entrances, the tunnel shielding them from the sun. “Your quirk use and form were impeccable!”

Her face reddened but he marked it off as her body regaining its equilibrium.

“O-Oh!” she started, turning to Tenya. “Why did Aizawa have to go to Midoriya?”

Tenya abruptly remembered the primal *panic* in Midoriya’s eyes and inhaled sharply. “I do not know if I am at liberty to say,” he confessed, concern leaking into his tone. “But he is in good hands.”

She nodded firmly, relaxing slightly. “That’s good to hear,”

When they split off, Tenya let himself bare a joyous grin to the empty hallway. Hopefully, Midoriya would be well enough to continue for his match against him.

He couldn’t wait to tell Tensei.

Izuku leaned into Hitoshi’s chest, his head resting comfortably on top of his nest of curls, as Mei rambled excitedly about the improvements her babies could have, now that she’s seen them in action, holding his hand all the while. Todoroki sat across from Izuku and Hitoshi, diagonal to Mei, and listened. Aizawa kept to himself in his sleeping bag, having stayed even after their arrival.

“I’m being used as a sales advertisement,” Hitoshi said flatly.

“I have it *all* planned out!”

“I’m so touched,” He sighed into his hair, grumbling. “Izuku, she’s going to murder me on live television.”

“Nope! When I’m done, you’ll get to move on without any fuss from me!”

Hitoshi raised an eyebrow. “So, what, I’m just getting a free pass?”

She grinned, awfully devilish. “I get to advertise and you don’t have to reveal your quirk to anyone!”

He made a noise of surprise, then huffed. “Fine, I guess.”

It was incredibly nice, Izuku decided, to hold someone’s hand. Mei held his hand tightly, using her other to gesture wildly. Hitoshi was wrapped around him, his head a comfortable weight. His hair was enough of a buffer to keep Hitoshi safe, and Izuku relished in the soft warmth he radiated.

Nothing like *their* fire.

“Zuzu?” Mei waved her hand in front of his face. “Still there?”

Instead of replying with a nod or signing something, Izuku spoke for the first time since they arrived, croaking out, “I r-ran into Endeavor be-before my match,”

Todoroki went still, his twitching expression of blankness portraying his disdain. Aizawa rolled over to face them all. Mei and Hitoshi remained around him, waiting for him to continue.

“What did he do?” Todoroki asked with deceiving evenness. Izuku’s quirk tugged at his senses, stripping the boy of the cover that could fool the rest of them.

“H-He, he grabbed my shoulder and I-I would’ve been fine, h-honestly, but- b-but h-h-he-”

Aizawa sat upright, looking ridiculous with only his head and hair poking out of the sleeping bag. “Take your time,” he soothed. “You are safe.”

“The *heat,”* Izuku said, pressing further into Hitoshi, who pressed

back. “And every, everything he said, i-it was so much l-like, like-” He shivered. “Like *him,”*

See, this was why he stayed away from assholes with fire quirks. Assholes and fire seem to be god’s favorite combo to chuck at Izuku and Todoroki. The mix had not been something Izuku had been subjected to in a long time. Bakugo’s quirk, while fire-like, is nothing like his father’s.

Izuku couldn’t exactly have flashbacks about what he remembered; the details were too fuzzy. But his brain never failed to conjure a feeling. A reaction, one embedded in him since his mother and father became hostile towards each other.

“Him?” Mei prodded.

Aizawa inhaled sharply, drawing their attention.

“What is it?” Hitoshi asked, his arms tightening around Izuku.

“Izuku,” Aizawa began. “May I say something?” He nodded, his throat clogging up. “Okay, signal if you want me to stop or if I have this wrong.”

He glanced at each of them, leveling them with a glare. “I feel as though this should go unsaid, but I will say it if you do not know,”

“None of this leaves the room,” Todoroki finished.

“Todoroki, you are the only one in the room who does not know who Izuku is staying with. He stays with Mic, Hitoshi, and I.” Again he glanced down at Izuku to check on him. “This is because we recently discovered that he has been living alone for the past several years. Both of his biological parents are completely off the grid and haven’t been seen anywhere. We still have their records, though, so we know who they were on paper.

“Kobayashi Hisashi had a quirk that allowed him to breathe fire. We admittedly don’t know much about their relationship, only that they split at different times. Though from what Izuku is saying, their relationship was clearly not the most functional.”

“And when Eneavwhore got in your face…” Mei trailed off.

The conclusion settled in the silence heavily. Izuku sunk into Hitoshi and squeezed Mei’s hand. Todoroki’s hands were curled into fists.

Aizawa sat with an impassive expression.

“My match is starting soon,” Todoroki intoned, leaving the room without another word.

Shouto curled and uncurled his fists as he walked down the halls.

It would have been right after their talk. Right after Shouto brought up distressing memories and spilled his own.

Of course, his thoughts snarled. *Why wouldn’t he go after the one friend I have? The universe has been too kind lately, allowing me this much happiness.*

Because he had been happy. Smitten with this newfound comradery between himself and Midoriya.

He would tell his father that UA offered supplementary training, the kind that was brutally efficient, and he would allow him to stay back to train.

Training with Midoriya put him on edge at first, especially when the boy insisted that he practice some minor control with his fire, but it was hard not to sink into the boy’s comforting aura. Gradually, Shouto reached a point where he could hold a small amount of flames along his arm without feeling trapped.

With Midoriya, Shouto found the practice… freeing.

He remained persistent on the matter of being able to switch the sides of how he can use his quirk. Using fire, no matter how much time he spent with Midoriya unknowingly undoing his trauma, was out of the question.

Fire consumed. Destroyed. It hurt everyone around it.

“What is it with fire quirks and abusive fathers?”

Now- Now *this.* His father tainting yet another aspect of his life, unwittingly triggering the other boy’s trauma.

“Shouto,”

Shouto, his mind mimicked bitterly. *How dare he. How dare he say*

things, do things that made Midoriya as fearful as he was.

"What do you want?" he bit out.

"You're acting disgraceful," when he paused, Shouto kept his mask of indifference and walked forward. "If you would have just used your left side, you would have had an overwhelming victory in both rounds. Stop this childish rebellion. You have a duty to surpass All Might,"

At his words, a conversation he had with Midoriya came to mind. It was nondescript for him, most likely, but his statement seared itself into Shouto's mind.

"Ha! I knew it!"

"Knew what?" Shouto questioned, intrigued by Midoriya's vibrating excitement. All he had done was create a wall of ice.

"You're perfect for rescue work!" Midoriya exclaimed, blindsiding him completely. "Just imagine all the good you could do if your precision improved even a little," he beamed, babbling slightly.

Before he could go off on a tangent, Shouto managed to cut him off. "What do you mean? My quirk is battle oriented,"

Midoriya let out something between a scoff and a laugh. "And? So what if you have overwhelming potential in combat? That doesn't mean you aren't suited to rescue work. The world needs good rescue heroes, Todoroki, and if you have an interest in being one, I think the industry would suit you."

It left him with a multitude of things to ponder, most of which led to revelations that Midoriya was right. If he chose to apply himself sufficiently, his power could be used for great rescues.

"You're different from your siblings," the bastard continued. "You are my greatest masterpiece and I won't stand for you losing to some quirkless runt who doesn't know his place. Not when you have my fire at your disposal."

"I don't need your fire," Shouto all but growled. "I'll show you that I can win with only Mom's quirk."

"It's yours," Midoriya's voice rebelled viciously.

He ignored it, controlled fury whirling inside of him, resonating in his

quirk, and stepped onto the field.

Ashido grinned across from him, determined despite what she knew of him.

“Give me a good match, Todoroki!” she demanded cheekily. “I wanna see if all those training sessions with Mido have paid off!”

“Begin!” Midnight shouted, slashing her whip through the air.

Ashido barrelled forward, hands already dripping with acid, and he-

He released his iron grip on his quirk and sent a glacier her way.

The action sent frost crawling up his skin, his left side surging under his control to adjust and help stabilize him.

Ashido broke from the ice, a laugh of nerves and glory escaping her as she shot forward once more. Her body glistened with acid, the ice behind her steaming.

“Oh, and would you look at that!” Present Mic howled. *“Even after that devastating move, Ashido is still in the running!”*

And run she did.

Her mobility far outmatched his now, due to his foolish outburst against an opponent who could free herself from his ice. Still, he moved. Slow, but powerful.

He could do this.

Warmth churned in his core and he shoved it away, damning the consequences.

Shouto remembered the day Midoriya came into class with his hands gloved and revealed the nature of his quirk and what he had done to himself. Repressing a quirk only led to a travesty for the user, something Shouto learned years ago when he suppressed his own. Since he recovered from his incident, he had been careful, toeing the line of ignoring the fire and suppressing it.

This definitely counted as suppression.

“That was *so* overkill, man!” Ashido pouted, slinging a glop of acid his way. He dodged the hasty throw and threw up another wave of ice, trapping her feet and causing her to fall forward. Yelping, Ashido

attempted to catch herself but her hands slipped and sunk into the ice under her. Her chin clacked against the surface and Shouto was tempted to wince in sympathy.

Instead, he raced forward and covered her in ice.

She shivered, fighting to escape, but he had propped her hands in the air and fixed them in a position where she couldn't place her main acid producers on the ice and free herself.

"Ashido, can you continue?"

"N-No," Ashido hissed, her exposed forearms shining with acid too thin to aid in an escape.

"Sorry," he muttered, pressing his left hand to the ice and allowing warmth to flood him. "I was mad."

Ashido scoffed, good-natured, and melancholy. "Welp, no one can tell me I didn't put up a good fight."

"You fought admirably,"

"I feel bad for Sero, honestly," she chuckled. "He won't have acid to break out of your ice."

"You seem sure he's going to win his fight,"

"Against Aoyama?" He blinked. He hadn't known who Sero was fighting. "No offense but that boy could use some rearranged priorities when it comes to fighting."

"I suppose,"

"Alright!" Midnight said once Ashido stood. "Clear out so we can clean up for the next match."

Ochako glanced at Kirishima as Sero and Aoyama were introduced.

"We should head down, huh?" She said.

"Yeah, we should,"

They walked in silence until they reached a point down the hall that led them to their respective waiting rooms.

“You’re my friend,” she said suddenly. “But I won’t go easy on you, so don’t you dare go easy on me!”

“I would never!” He declared, grinning. “It would be pretty unmanly of me to hold back. You aren’t fragile.”

Those words carried her to the field, her nerves becoming nerve, the icy grip around her heart thawing, igniting.

The world was watching. Her *parents* were watching. She would do this for them. They deserved nice things and the chance to relax. They deserved to live comfortably without worrying about bills and paying for her tuition on top of the company. They wouldn’t let her help because they wanted her to follow her dreams.

Her dream was to see them happy. Not bone-tired, with a smile that twisted too easily into a frown. If she could save a few people along the way, then all the better.

Her heart thumped against her chest, determination shoving aside any doubt. Doubt had no place in her.

Ochako would win.

For them.

For herself.

Yeah, I got this.

Eijiro forced himself to quit fiddling with the fabric of his PE uniform when Mic-sensei called them out to the field. No matter how hyped up he had been after the cavalry battle,

Uraraka had this look in her eyes, a burning desire to *win* that Eijiro simply couldn’t ignore. The world beyond the two of them felt muffled as blood roared in his ears.

Midnight signaled to begin and both of them darted forward.

He needed to be careful or else she would beat him the moment he got close. Now, Eijiro was no Midoriya, he couldn’t hope to move as fast or count on his opponent being slow, but Uraraka was limited. He could make his entire body a weapon but she had to get him with five

fingers.

Eijiro threw himself out of her range to avoid being turned into a human balloon.

Looks like said five fingers would be hell to avoid.

He grinned, ready for the challenge. Charging, he managed to land a hit on her shoulder before she whipped around, fingers splayed and reaching. They avoided each other, parrying and twisting out of range, but the crowd thundered above them each time one of them dared to make a move on the other. They were both close-ranged and Eijiro was tempted to wince when he hit her soft body, but she didn't give him time to rethink, keeping him on his toes with every pivot and grab for victory.

She gasped in pain when he landed a hit to her shoulder blade. He had been making his blows land on her back, staying away from her front as best as he could manage. His uniform had been caught in her zero gravity and released several times now. His knuckles hurt from slamming into the ground after she tried to land a blow when she fell. His breath hitched as something kicked into his eyes and-

Fingers closed around his wrists.

Before he could even finish thinking of a curse, Eijiro was tossed out of the ring, inertia carrying him into a wall. He dropped at the press of Uraraka's glowing fingertips and panted on his side.

"Kirishima is out of bounds! Uraraka wins!"

Fumikage batted away Dark Shadow in the waiting room. They were about to battle a formidable opponent and this was no time for distractions. He needed to focus, remain serene. He had to remain in control-

"Fumi, come on!" Dark Shadow pleaded. "Aren't you tired of being nice?" Fumikage gave him a flat look. "Don't you just wanna go apeshit?"

"Do not quote such words to me," he said in annoyance. "Your use of expletives does not garner my compliance. I doubt that permitting you to rampage would even grant us the victory, considering our

adversary."

"So vine-girl makes vines, doesn't mean we aren't going to win,"

"You cannot simply bat her across the field, she is too poised to allow such an assault to be her demise."

"Psh, Fumi, I think I can get through some vines just fine,"

He rolled his eyes in exasperation. "Vegetation does not concern me, but her range is far greater than ours, Dark Shadow. One way or another, this match will end far more quickly than the previous if we do not come up with a suitable defense."

"Total annihilation!"

"With what strategy," he stressed. "She has an army of vines at her behest that are resistant to blunt strikes and are warded off by our own weakness. If we wish to win, then we must-"

"AAAND FOR OUR NEXT ROUND-"

"-plan." Fumikage finished miserably.

Denki fidgeted as he awaited the beginning of his match. The image of Tokoyami being wrapped in vines and thrown out of the ring made him wish for a happy death because he would certainly not be receiving one.

Bakugo was quick, Denki just had to be quicker.

Yeah, right.

On the field, Bakugo glared murderously and he put on his best grin.

Midnight slashed her whip.

"Indiscriminate-"

"DIE!"

Nothing.

Finding out Izuku's life was even more of a trainwreck was decidedly not fun. Finding out that he had some kind of repressed PTSD that Endeavwhore forced to the surface was even more *not fun.*

You know what was fun, though? Watching Mei rant about all the babies Izuku and her could make together that would invent that would make bank and show him that, hell yeah, anyone can be successful, powerful quirk or not, until Izuku giggled. Something even better was watching his dad be pulled into a group hug after a disgustingly sappy declaration from Mei.

Hitoshi winced at the brutal display of power as it played on the TV of the waiting room. Bakugo decimated Kaminari before he could finish the move. A burst of electricity visibly exploded from him, charging the air as he passed out.

His guaranteed win would lead him right into the hands of that demon but if Hitoshi could make him speak, (and Izuku informed him that he would barely have to try) then the match was his.

Hitoshi had a chance here, to win.

It would not be wasted.

Shoot for the stars (but don't let them blind you)

Chapter Notes

Hi-hi! I hope you had a good week (and if not, maybe this'll lift your spirits)

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

Izuku did not, in fact, know how this would play out.

Iida stood across from him, looking content with the thumbs up he gave in response to Iida's concerned gaze, and Izuku surveyed him carefully.

Iida was, without a doubt, faster than him. Stronger, too, but he felt that dwelling on his many disadvantages for too long would only lead to his immediate loss.

Jitters plagued him from the recent exposure of his past. Though Todoroki came back after his match, radiating crisp air, and sat with them again, he hadn't said another word.

The sudden change of no one knowing to four people knowing wasn't settling well in him, either.

A blur alerted him to Iida shooting forward. *Shit,* he thought, narrowly avoiding Iida's attack. *I didn't even hear Midnight start the match.* Recipro Burst had yet to make another appearance and Izuku was absolutely correct about not being able to outrun him.

But what if he could outmaneuver him?

Izuku let him close him, the crowd's volume rising as he did, then, as Iida reached out-

He dropped, throwing himself out of the way, and sprung to his feet. Regaining his balance, he risked a glance at Iida, who turned sharply on his right leg.

Izuku felt the edge of his mouth tug up.

They continued on like that, Iida attacking and almost catching him, only for him to slip out of range. His limbs smarted with the forming bruises of the hits Iida did land. He couldn't stay invincible forever, after all. It reminded him of his last match, where he was entirely on the defensive until the very end. The crowd seemed to think so too, weak cheers filtering through his ears. His matches dragged on and there wasn't much action for the crowd to be invested in.

He met Iida's eye as he shot after empty air, the two of them exchanging split-second grins.

"Stop toying with your opponents!"

Izuku nearly missed a step when he heard the shout. More followed, as if that individual invited them to start saying things too.

"Yeah! This is supposed to be a fight!"

"Boo!"

"Get off the field!"

Izuku gritted his teeth, narrowing his eyes in irritation. *It doesn't matter,* he repeated to himself. *Don't listen to them. I know what I'm doing.*

"Who started this?" Aizawa's voice cut through the shouting, cold as ice. *"Are you a pro? If you are, you should go ahead and resign."*

Izuku caught a glimpse of a man in a hero costume standing in the crowd before dropping to the ground and catching the toe of Iida's shoe. He said something that Izuku didn't catch, his voice lost to the rustle and yelp Iida created as he regained his balance.

"If you were really watching, you would know that Midoriya has a strategy to win, just as he did when he fought Tetsutetsu,"

Come on, Izuku pleaded, allowing Iida into his range again. *Work.*

Iida turned sharply on his right leg and-

Fell.

Izuku was on him in an instant, trapping his arm in a lock and applying pressure slowly. "Don't even think about it," he panted harshly, pressing down harder when Iida's engines began lighting up.

“Yield,” he finally wheezed and Izuku immediately released him, falling back onto his butt.

“Midoriya wins!” Midnight declared.

They both sat there, gasping, as the crowd erupted.

“He purposefully made his opponent pivot on one leg each time until it gave out,” Aizawa explained.

“THERE YA HAVE IT, FOLKS,” Yamada said over his husband. *“MIDORIYA, THE STRATEGIST!”*

“Is that,” Iida huffed. “Is that true?”

Offering a sheepish smile, he nodded. “I didn’t have time to come up with anything else,”

“No, it was exceptional,” he looked away, shoulders sagging. “I simply wished I had been able to last longer.” Iida stood on shaky legs and offered Izuku his hand.

Taking it, he joined Iida on his feet. “I-I wasn’t messing around, by the way,” he said softly. “I took this seriously.”

“I know, Midoriya.”

Mitsu squealed, a shout escaping her. “Yumi! Yumi, look!” she pointed at the screen. “He’s being ruthless! Just like we taught him,”

“Our children are very skilled,” Ayumi smiled, revealing her sharper-than-normal teeth.

They both scowled when the crowd turned against their green bean.

“Those assholes! I can’t believe they’d *boo* him!”

Ayumi leaned back into their couch, tapping her finger on the popcorn bowl before raising it to sign. *“They have no sight for battle, obviously, if they see our Clover’s actions as toying with his opponent.”*

Shouta spoke, his voice even and irritated, and they both promised to make him a gift or two. The camera focussed on a pro standing with a clenched jaw.

“That kid is just messing with his opponents,” he frowned. “Didn’t you see how he isn’t even hitting them? He’s just leading them around.”

“If you were really watching, you would know that Midoriya has a strategy to win, just as he did when he fought Tetsutetsu,”

More than two things.

“Yeah, get ‘im, Zuku!” She cheered when he pinned the Iida boy.

“I wonder if he plans to remove his gloves,” Ayumi signed. *“He does not need to, of course, if he is uncomfortable, but still.”*

“And he’s got all those scars to worry about, too,” Mitsu added with a small wince at the thought of the scars on both of his arms. “I doubt he’ll want to show those the world.”

They waited for the next match to start in silence.

Hanta stretched his arms over his head, meeting the eyes of Class 1-A’s resident powerhouse. They stared him down with cool, heterochromatic indifference and he suppressed the urge to shiver in anticipation of the blast of ice he knew would be on its way the moment Midnight started the match.

Mina didn’t win against him and she actually had a good quirk to counter him.

Still, Hanta gulped and *grinned.*

Ochako curled her hands into fists, hoping, despite the odds that she will win this match.

Ibara’s quirk made her own practically obsolete. Touching the vines would do nothing since she could actively control them. Ochako’s chance of getting close enough to touch her actual body was even slimmer than not being immobilized and thrown out of the ring like Tokoyami within the first minute of the match.

Welp, Ochako thought, taking a deep breath, *what will I know if I never try?*

Katsuki glared at the Gen Ed bastard that stood on the other side of the field. He'd seen him hanging around Deku since the school year began. His last match with Dreadlocks gave Katsuki no indication of his quirk, nothing to plan around or for. And since Dreadlocks was Deku's friend, too, he probably planned that with them to give this purple-eyed fucker a better chance at giving Katsuki the slip. Whatever the fuck his quirk was, it was undoubtedly a wierd one. That's the only reason he would have latched onto Deku so quickly.

His thoughts were still scattered from that shitty conversation between Candycane and Deku, which only served to piss him off further.

Deku called himself an orphan. Said his dad fucking *abused* him.

He agonized over how fucking little he seemed to know about Deku's life suddenly. Before UA, he just sort of imagined what he assumed was a regular household for Deku and his parents. That image had been destroyed on the first day of UA, irreparably fucking his perspective. Sure, he hadn't seen Inko in years and he'd never met Deku's dad but how did all that shit go down without him noticing? How did Deku manage to be abandoned without any changes in the way he acted?

Why had he even been left was another question nagging at his brain. The answer would have easily been his lack of a quirk if Katsuki had been asked a few months ago, so it would be logical to say that whatever the fuck kind of quirk he had was the reason instead. Katsuki scoffed at the idea; if that were true, she wasn't nearly as kind as he remembered her being when they met.

Another thing that made him want to tear his hair out was all the progress Deku's made since the start of UA. Winning that battle trial, holding off the hand bastard at the USJ. He's been giving out those creepy ass analyses of their classmates to them so that the extras can hone their technique and it's been *working.* Katsuki heard Dunce Face and Invisible Girl talking over the improvements they were able to make with his notes.

Katsuki heard *teachers* say shit about how helpful his fucking notebooks had been. Where the hell did *that* come from?

Now this. Shitty *Deku* won both of the preliminary rounds and his two first matches. His next one was against that Half 'n Half bastard and

Katsuki honestly had no idea who would win. Mic called Deku a strategist and he was right. That shitstain was clever, and with his endurance and drive, he stood a chance against that discount peppermint.

Just as fucking distracting was the sob story Half ‘n Half’ spewed, but he shoved all those unwanted thoughts away as Eye Bags gave him a sly smirk.

“You look pretty angry, Bakugo. Scared you’ll lose?”

Oh, it was *fucking on.*

Midnight swung her whip, signalling the beginning of the match and he propelled himself forward with explosions.

His hands crackled, a feral grin splitting his face as Katsuki readied himself to lunge. “I’ll show you *scared-”*

Everything in his immediate awareness fell away, muffled by a thick fog.

“Turn around and walk out of bounds,” commanded a voice. It was the only thing he could hear, the only thing he could make sense of. His body moved of its own accord until he stepped over the boundary line.

Katsuki blinked and his awareness was given back to him on that bastard’s whim. He growled through his gritted teeth, trying to find his balance after having his autonomy stripped away from him.

He was right. *This* was why he cozied up to Deku. Freaks, the both of them.

But moreso, he gritted his teeth because he lost.

He was Bakugo Katsuki, and he *lost.*

Izuku stared at his bare palms, the long support gloves laid out on the table of the waiting room. His left hand had slightly crooked fingers and small lacerations marred the skin noticeably. Only partially covered by the uniform, disfigured scarring stood out against his freckled arm but didn’t look out of place, considering the other arm.

He put the gloves back on.

Izuku would not be able to be Todoroki like he had Tetsutetsu and Iida. He was a long-range fighter, who now had a reputation for encasing his opponents in blocks of ice.

But Izuku saw it, even if others might not. Todoroki was slower, walking off the field. He wasn't using his fire to balance himself.

He cursed the flaming incarnate of trash that was Todoroki's sperm donor and stepped into the sun again. The crowd cheered for him and he could hear their pity, their anticipation. His audience didn't like to watch his fights and Todoroki was the epitome of what they wanted a hero to be. Strong, with a powerful Quirk to throw around, not to mention he was the Number Two hero's son. Izuku was clever, with no quirk in sight, and unheard of until now.

They wanted to see him crushed under the heel of his opponent. They wanted him to eat his words.

Izuku refused.

"Folks, who knows how this is gonna play out! We have Todoroki of Class 1-A, who has repeatedly frozen his foes in GLACIERS! AAAND MIDORIYA! Who has drawn out his fights and dominated each round! Who will win? THE POWERHOUSE OR THE ENIGMA?"

After managing to avoid the initial trap by a hair, Izuku somehow found himself close enough to throw a jab into the left side of Todoroki's face. They were both being held back by the effort that sapped their energy in their previous rounds, but Izuku had the edge. Todoroki's left side was vulnerable. It wouldn't matter that they knew each other's moves by now, from all the sparring, if he couldn't uphold a proper defense.

All he needed to do was stay close. If he managed that, he could keep Todoroki on the defensive and hammer his left side.

The cold air that surrounded them made his lungs constrict. It was hard enough, with all the ice he had to avoid slipping in and getting trapped in, but he wouldn't be able to keep this up for much longer.

Izuku was freezing.

And so was Todoroki.

“What are you doing?” he yelled out, watching his friend’s right side freeze over. “Warm yourself up! You won’t be able to win, to be a hero-”

Todoroki growled, sending another sheet of ice at him. “If I have to use that bastard’s fire to do either-”

Izuku shoved him with a sharp jab, glaring. “God, Todoroki, haven’t you been listen-”

“And what if-” he shuddered, breath puffing out visibly. “What if I scare you? Fire, it- How can I-”

“Your fire could *never* frighten me,” Izuku stated confidently, pausing his assault to meet his eyes. “Because it’s *yours.* And I’ll never be afraid of you.”

His eyes widened, breath coming out in ragged bursts. “Midoriya…” he whispered, a shine appearing in his eyes.

Heat exploded in the arena.

“WHOA, what was THAT? IS TODOROKI USING HIS FIRE?”

Warmth tickled his skin because of the proximity. Goosebumps rose, unbidden, but he watched the ice around them melt. He watched Todoroki’s right side stabilize.

“Why are you smiling?”

Izuku tore his gaze from the thawing side and met his friend’s stare. It felt like something vulnerable was being laid before him. Something precious.

“It’s just that I’m glad to meet you,” Izuku adopted a low stance, not breaking eye-contact. *“Shouto.”*

Shouto carried Midoriya off the field, the boy heavy on his back and rigid with muscle.

He felt… warm. The pleasant sort, the kind that blooms in your chest and spreads out within your body.

The way Midoriya had stared at him, the unadulterated awe in his viridian gaze, Shouto had never been viewed by somebody like that.

Their fight ended quickly after his fire *(Shouto's* fire) made an appearance. Midoriya had been flung across the field and over the boundary line by the explosive combination of rapidly heating and cooling the air.

"Hey, Todoroki?" Midoriya rasped softly, resting his cheek on the unburned right side of his uniform. "If I crossed a line, calling you S-Shouto, s-sorry."

He huffed, several places on his left side aching with each step. "You didn't," Shouto said truthfully. "I-I wouldn't mind if you *kept* calling me that."

With a glance, he watched Midoriya's face turn pink. "O-Oh." Before Shouto could backtrack, he pressed his face into his shoulder. "Then, c-call me Izuku,"

He stopped at the exit door for a moment, their eyes locked and expressions open. "Izuku," he tested, the name a whisper in the empty hallway.

The exit door opened, revealing… *Endeavor.*

"I'm glad to see that you have gotten over your childish rebellion," His eyes slid to Izuku, smug with displaced pride. "What was it about not needing a powerful quirk to win? Shouto-"

Shouto didn't wait any longer before side-stepping his father and walking out the door. Izuku chuckled lightly against the fabric of his uniform.

"Do not-"

"How did you even get down here? This is a student and faculty only area."

"I am-"

"Not a member of faculty or a student. You should go."

"Shouto-"

"That is my name, but I don't know why you're still here. Should I call a teacher to escort you out?"

Taking the hint, Endeavor glared at the two of them before stalking down the opposite end of the hallway.

“That was amazing,” Izuku said, amused. “I sort of wish he had stayed, we could have sicced Aizawa on him.”

“We could simply put him in the same room as Hatsume if you want,” he offered. “I’m sure she can be equally terrifying when she desires.”

“Oh, you have no idea,”

“Mom, hey, have you heard from Tensei?” Tenya massaged the muscles in his legs, not wanting to become sore. “I know I lost, but-”

“Oh, Tenya, we- we aren’t worried about that. We-We’re so proud of you,” she cried, alarming him.

“Mom, what-”

“It’s your brother.” She said it so fast, he barely caught it. *“It’s Tensei. He was in Hosu a-and the Hero Killer-”* His mother broke into sobs and he forced himself to not think of the worst words to complete that sentence. *“He’s alive, Tenya.”* Relief flooded him in an instant, the phone shaking in his trembling grip.

“He’s alive but they say that he’s- he’s paralyzed.”

Courtesy of Cementoss, they stood on the newly made ground.

The ends of Ibara’s hair flicked with subtle impatience as she stared him down.

“Start!”

Her vines shot towards him as he yelled in panic. “What the *hell* are you doing?”

Ibara’s eyes narrowed, vines reaching him. “I am simply-”

Gotcha.

Shouto met his opponent's lavender eyes and thought about what he might do.

This friend of Izuku's had won every single match without having to move. Yamazawa's quirk remained a mystery but he had an inkling to what activated it.

Their match began and for once, he didn't open with a huge ice move.

"Are you sure you're good to do this match?" Yamazawa asked. "Izuku beat you up pretty badly."

Making an easy decision, Shouto said, "I know what I'm doing."

A fog descended over his consciousness and Shouto smiled internally.

Looks like he guessed right.

Hitoshi smiled unabashedly as All Might put the first-place medal over his head. He felt light-headed with glee and full of gratification.

He had done it. Holy hell, Hitoshi *won* the *Sports Festival.*

UA would have to transfer him into the Hero course.

Ibara stood on the third-place podium, her mouth pinched but her stance relaxed when she donned the third-place medal. Todoroki stoically accepted his silver medal, seeming content with second place.

When he won, Pops went ballistic over the intercoms, congratulating his victory without restraint. He could barely believe it until they had him stand on the platform and it rose to display him to the crowd.

First place. *First fucking place.*

Hitoshi didn't have the words.

They would be going over to the Hatsumes' tomorrow to celebrate, apparently.

But in the house, with his family and their cats, they all cried. Pops was a blubbering mess, Dad quietly proud but vocal, his soft rumble praising his hard work. Izuku wouldn't stop smiling, squeezing his hand with his gloved hands as tears ran down both of their faces.

Yamazawa Hitoshi, the boy with a brainwashing quirk, was on track to be a hero.

Hitoshi wondered when it stopped being a distant dream he couldn't touch. When he actually began believing his impossible aspiration wasn't so unattainable.

"Stop sobbing, it's getting embarrassing," Dad said to Pops like he wasn't wiping at his own eyes.

"But he's- Shou, he's- he *won,"* Pops sniffed, keeping Hitoshi in a one-armed hug. "Next week he'll be in the Hero course!"

"As if this is surprising," Dad scoffed, ruffling his already mussed hair. "Our son has an abundance of potential."

Huh, he thought, staring at his dad with awe, his eyes watering again. *Maybe that's where that lack of doubt came from.*

Chizome Akaguro watched the first year speech again, humming in interest. The comments underneath it ranged from supportive to derogatory and Chizome found himself agreeing with the former group.

His words showed the presence of an open mind and his face revealed his conviction, his need to be heard. And the way he fought… it was as if he possessed no quirk at all. Chizome would be inclined to believe that theory if not for the specialized clothing he wore to cover his skin. Drawn out matches followed by rapid takedowns. The boy could read his adversary's moves with the kind practiced ease that made him wonder who taught him.

Defensive, until the Todoroki boy.

His lip curled at the thought of the little helion, the son of that *fake* trying to become a hero.

Because when he fought Endeavor's son Midoriya switched his style.

Breaking his streak of evasion, he ruthlessly went after the boy. Chizome noted that his attacks were focussed on his left side, where the boy had yet to use his father's flames.

Their onslaught on each other paused, Midoriya and Todoroki exchanging words, ones filled with meaning if their expression said anything.

Fire lit up the arena, whiting out the view until it simmered down.

And revealed Midorya smiling.

Who are you, little hero? Chizome asked into the night. *Who will you become?*

Something set off his senses and he threw a knife. There was a clatter and he turned to see purple mist form, yellow eyes focussing on him.

"Hero Killer: Stain, the League of Villains would like to speak with you."

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the support!

Curiosity Killed the Cat

Chapter Notes

There's fluff and stuff so I think this is pretty okay.

Thank you for all the comments and kudos!!

We get yamazawa dads being dads and some... other things

Edit: 5/14/2021

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 14

“Take that, objectification!” Hagakure cheered, admiring her costume and additional visor. “Momo, say it with me. Fuck sexism!”

Yaoyorozu had a nervous but excited look on her face, a smile tugging on her lips. “F-Fuck sexism,”

“Woo!” Uraraka shouted, pumping her fist in the air. Mei joined her, “Fuck sexism!” they both cheered.

Jiro pulled the edge of her new gloves, smirking. “Fuck sexism,”

Shouto looked between them and nodded sagely with Tokoyami, both of them saying, “Fuck sexism,” in unison.

Hitoshi and Izuku grinned at each other. “Fuck sexism,”

Tsuyu and Kirishima smiled. “Fuck sexism,” they said together.

“You’re all problem children.” Aizawa sighed, adding, “Fuck sexism.”

Powerloader rolled into the room. “Do you like your costumes? Everything comfortable?” He asked, looking over some forms.

Yaoyorozu nodded firmly, beaming at her new costume. It was a complete shift from her old one. The full bodysuit she wore was the same red as her last one, with white accents, her yellow belt still present for whatever supplies she may need, as well as a holster for a secured knife. “Yes, sir, this is much better.”

“Yeah,” Uraraka said, stretching out her arms. Her own suit, along with the others, now possessed more protective cloth. Her puffy heels had been replaced with more reliable boots and her costume wasn’t as sexualized, but her overall theme remained intact. “Much better.”

Hagakure’s costume was infused with her DNA, like Yaoyorozu’s, and absorbed light as she did, or reflected it to reveal her presence and limbs when needed. Her rose-colored helmet visor, which Mei built to be able to turn invisible if the girl wished it, was designed like Izuku’s goggles to aid her in her stealth.

Tsuyu’s costume needed less changing and more adjusting, according to her, more protection, a weapon added to her person, and she jumped on the goggles bandwagon, saying that hers could be better.

Jiro added directional speakers for more finite control and something more preventative against lethal weapons under her regular costume.

Kirishima added a black layer of Kevlar over his exposed chest and arms to protect possible victims in an attack. His body turned jagged but under the cloth they would, at most, be uncomfortable to the victim. The Kevlar was also insurance in case he wasn’t using his quirk and someone attacked without him noticing. His fists stayed bare, “For some manly punches,”

Tokoyami’s costume now included a flashlight to calm Dark Shadow and his cape was modified to detach if yanked to avoid choking him.

Shouto’s suit was now modified to withstand both extreme temperatures of his cold and hot sides.

Hitoshi, who needed an entirely new hero costume, chose to design one with an obvious homage to his father. His capture weapon sat on his shoulders, shuffling every so often as the nanobots in the cloth adjusted to its new bond to Hitoshi. Aizawa said the bonding process would go faster if he used it continuously, but since he didn’t have the proper skill to use the capture weapon precisely yet, Aizawa warned him against trying to grab things with it yet. Aizawa also handed Hitoshi a knife. When asked for an explanation, he said that Hitoshi should have something to cut the capture weapon with, in case he was trapped by it. His support item, a voice modifier that could mimic other people’s voices, was being built by Powerloader, though Mei seemed to be butting into the project.

Like Tsuyu, Izuku only needed some adjustments to his design. His gun was less bulky now, the various types of ammo he created in

small magazines, held in the pouches of his utility belt. His gloves, which previously reached up to his biceps, now cut off at his wrists so they were easier to discard. They were pretty confident that he wouldn't outright die if he used his quirk for an extended amount of time, thanks to training it regularly, but Izuku was hesitant to put that theory to the test. Flares were added to his arsenal, too, because if he ran into trouble too big for him to handle by himself, he figured a signal by flare would provide him some backup.

Izuku caught Hitoshi's eye as he fiddled with his capture weapon and smiled kindly. Hitoshi nodded back, using his hand to wave the end of his capture weapon at Izuku.

Soon enough, all of them filed out and changed into their school uniforms. Aizawa led them to their classroom, everyone following after him like little ducklings as they chatted amongst themselves. Hitoshi's entrance into Class 1-A triggered an eruption of cheers and whoops from the students already present.

"Quit it," Aizawa said terse, all bark, no bite. Izuku smiled, knowing that he was just as happy for Hitoshi's success as the rest of them. "We have some announcements to get through,"

Once everyone was seated and quiet, Aizawa waved Hitoshi forward. "Firstly, we have a new student."

Taking his cue, Hitoshi straightened. "Hello, my name is Yamazawa Hitoshi," he bowed, voice steady. "Please treat me well."

"Take your seat behind Midoriya," Aizawa glared at the sound of his students breaking out into murmurs. "Why am I being interrupted?"

Kaminari raised his hand, "Where'd Mineta go?"

At this, Aizawa's bland expression changed into his signature unsettling grin. "Do you see twenty-one desks in this room?" He said, voice level. "Mineta's academic skills are proficient but his potential as a hero is the lowest within this class. I have also received several notices of his unwanted wandering hands. I do not promote sexual harassment and he failed to stop despite recieving warnings. General Education transfer students *replace* Hero students, they are not simply added to the class."

He waited, met with stunned silence, before gesturing to the board behind him and clicking a pointer to reveal stats. Their names appeared on the board, an obvious line of difference between

classmates who made it to the second and third rounds compared to anyone who was knocked out in the first round.

“As you can see,” he pointed at Todoroki’s signifigantly larger number, then at Iida and Bakugo’s names, which were directly under his. “The internship offers do not line up with the winners of the bracket.”

“Why’re Mido and Yamazawa so low?” Kirishima frowned. “Yamazawa *won* the Festival and Mido got by without even using a quirk!”

“Exactly.” The eyes of his classmates turned to Izuku, who stared at the board with disdain. “Heroes aren’t going to offer me an internship because they don’t know my quirk and I probably scared them off with my speech.”

“I didn’t get many offers because my quirk isn’t that appealing to most,” Hitoshi shrugged. “People are biased.”

Uraraka’s nose wrinkled in displeasure. “Well, that’s just plain rude, then.”

“Yes,” Aizawa agreed easily. “But we aren’t here to dwell on fairness or what should be done. Your offers will be given out at the end of class. Before then, you will be deciding something that is going to impact the future of your hero career-”

Midnight burst into the room, grinning with wide, excited eyes. “Hero names! You’ll be picking your hero names!”

Izuku blinked. He had kind of… forgotten about those. He thought of the evenings he wrote names on the corners of his notebook pages, the letters crammed into corners or given their own pages. His ears burned, wondering if his teachers saw some of them when they had inspected his notebooks. In the oldest ones, surely they had seen the scrawled *Small Might* or *Mighty Man.* As he aged though, he stopped giving a hero name much thought.

None of the ones he came up with when he was younger would make much sense for him to use now. Dekiru popped into his head but Izuku wanted to keep that spot of light to himself. Derived from “Deku”, which was derogatory and connected to years of bad memories, Dekiru was given to him by a friend. Dekiru was Izuku’s gift, whether Uraraka realized it or not, and Izuku wanted to hold that name and its positive connotations close to his chest.

Izuku was terrible at sharing after being an only child and alone for so long, but he figured this was something he could stand to keep to himself.

Izuku thought of his quirk, of how it fought him for so long and thrashed against his control for years. He thought of the sludge villain incident and how he had released his quirk from its cage. Izuku remembered the distinct surge of energy that overflowed his veins, the crash after he stuffed it back into its box and his body rejected the sudden change.

Opening his marker, Izuku wrote down his hero name.

“Izuku,” He turned in his seat, facing Hitoshi and Shouto. “Please help us?”

He chuckled and began asking them questions about what sort of theme they were going for. Hitoshi obviously wanted something that didn’t make him out to be some creep, but he also liked the idea of his hero name being connected to his quirk. Shouto begrudgingly wanted to include his range of temperature in his name, admitting that any previous names he came up with completely excluded any mention of his fire.

Aoyama was nuts, Izuku realized, watching as he presented a whole-ass sentence to the class.

Midnight was even worse, Izuku decided, listening to her give him minor edits.

Their classmates rose and presented their own names, some accepted by Midnight, others shot down. King Explosion Murder nearly had Izuku in stitches but Izuku didn’t want to die at that moment so he simply sat stiffly and ignored Bakugo’s shouts. Honestly, he chose that when they were *children,* hadn’t he come up with anything else? Evidently not, Izuku thought, watching Bakugo stomp back to his seat without procuring another name.

“Pyrice,” Shouto said evenly, holding up his board. Midnight agreed vehemently, which Shouto nodded at with his usual lack of enthusiasm.

Hitoshi stood next. “Pied Piper,” he said, drawing a chorus of “oohs” from his new classmates.

Izuku stepped up to the podium and flipped his board to face the

class. “Surge,” he stated proudly. His classmates chuckled, muttering about the Sports Festival. He sat down and watched the last of his classmates put forth their names.

Iida stood and Izuku’s mood dipped, seeing his sullen expression. Iida gave his own name, something bitter seeping into his tone.

“I’m thinking about going with Uwabami,” Yoayorozu said uncertainly when Jiro asked what internship she would take.

Izuku whipped around, startling the people in his general vicinity. He made a beeline toward Yaoyorozu. “Did any of your offers have a hero with a quirk like your own?”

Yaoyorozu frowned. “What is wrong with Uwabami?”

“When you look her up, the first thing you see is her hair products,” Izuku said. “Her career is focussed on the celebrity side of heroics, not the… heroics.”

Yaoyorozu checked her pile of papers again. “Her offer is still incredibly notable,” she mumbled. “Simply because she specializes in one area does not mean she lacks in another.”

Izuku nodded but his mind was still remembering all the commercials and interviews. Uwabami formally specialized in rescue operations and used her fame as a hero to promote the side business she ran. Personally, Izuku had no problems with this. Heroics was an occupation nowadays. He just didn’t want Yaoyorozu to pick her and then possibly waste her internship with a hero that wouldn’t push her to grow.

“You don’t have to change your decision,” he quickly said. “But, what are you trying to learn on your internship? If Uwabami’s the hero that has a skill you want to learn, then just forget I ever said anything. But if she doesn’t, I’m sure someone else on that list gave you another incredibly notable offer.”

“Hey, Midoriya,” Kirishima called, mirth practically dripping from his tone. “Bakugo’s taking an internship with Best Jeanist. What do you think?’

Bakugo’s responding glare could have withered a cactus. “Why the

fuck would I care about Deku's-"

"Not the most compatible," he answered, shrugging.

Immediately, that burning scowl snapped to him. "What'd you say, shitty Deku?" he growled, standing up from his seat. "Think I'm too weak to intern with a top pro?"

Izuku met his gaze head on, familiar with his attempts at intimidation. "Best Jeanist is concerned with poise and finesse. His work as a hero earned him a top ranking but he believes in composure and self-discipline."

"Who should he intern with?" Ashido asked, using Kaminari as her unwilling human shield when Bakugo turned to scowl her.

"I'm not taking any fucking reccomendations, Racoon Eyes."

"Mirko." Izuku said, holding back a grin when his answer fueled more fire for his raging anger. "She's mainly a solo hero and her personality could match Bakugo's in intensity."

Bakugo stalked towards him, murder in his eyes. "Don't talk about me like I'm not in the damn room, Deku." Pops in his hand signalled him losing his composure and Izuku's body responded accordingly, tensing and bracing for a blow.

A flash of red from the front of the room and the pops immediately halted. "Bakugo," Aizawa said in warning.

Bakugo returned to his seat and the commotion ended. Ignoring the fuzzy feeling in his chest at Aizawa coming to his defence, Izuku walked over to Shouto's desk.

"Who do you want to intern with?" Izuku asked, peering down at his offers.

"Endeavor, probably," he answered, much to Izuku's horror.

"Woah, what?" Izuku glanced down at Endeavor's name on the top of his papers. "Why?"

Shouto shrugged noncommittally. "I need to learn how to use my fire."

"I understand that," Izuku acquiesced. "But there are more heroes that you could learn control from that would not treat you like a tool to be

used for their personal gain.”

He considered it, obviously not against the idea of not having to intern with his father. “Which heroes would you suggest? You seem to know who would be suited to your classmates.”

Face burning, Izuku didn’t acknowledge his comment. “Present Mic,” he said. “Check to see if he gave you an offer.”

“Present Mic?” Shouto echoed after a brief pause. “As in our English teacher?”

“Yes,” Izuku said, ignoring the unsubtle way Hitoshi lifted his head out of his arms to listen to their conversation. “His quirk is passive, always on, because it is literally his voice. The control he has over it is the only reason he can talk without our bodies imploding.” Shouto’s eyebrow raised in an ‘And?’ expression. “Your fire released in a huge burst during the Sports Festival. And while that’s really cool, it won’t work as an amazing offence if you can’t control the output. Yamada is one of the most intelligent people I’ve met and he is as popular as he is with people for a reason. Your quirks and attitudes may be different but he would give you a wonderful internship experience.”

He caught sight of Hitoshi burying his face back into his arms from the corner of his eye. Aizawa shifted at the front of the room. Abruptly, he turned red.

Shouto stared at him curiously. “I’ll think about it.”

Tenya turned away from Midoriya, hoping to convey his desire to be alone. His friend acted oblivious of his action and sat down next to him. Realizing that he wasn’t going to take the hint unless Tenya told him directly, he shifted to face Midoriya. “Please go away, Midoriya. I’d like to be alone.”

Something flashed across his face at his statement but the emotion was gone too fast for Tenya to catch it. “I have two things to say, then I’ll be out of your hair.”

“Midoriya-”

“You helped me during the Sports Festival,” he interrupted, an edge of nervousness bringing Tenya fully into the conversation. “I never got

the chance to thank you for it, so, thank you."

Heat seared up the back of his neck. "I was merely doing what any hero would do," *It was what Tensei would have done, too,* he thought bitterly.

Midoriya smiled. "Still, it means a lot to me. And while I won't offer platitudes, I want you to know that if you ever need anything, a hug, a place to blow things up, a pencil, I'll be there for you." With those as his parting words, Midoriya stood up and walked back to his lunch table.

A place to destroy things felt rather tempting, Tenya thought as his inner turmoil began to rile him again. The same desire to destroy moved his hand to Manual's internship offer. His brother had been maimed by a *monster*. A monster who was still roaming the streets and waiting to cause more mayhem. A monster who was waiting to kill or maim another hero who had a family and a dream to make the world a better place.

Stain had a quota to fulfill, and he would stay in Hosu until his mission was completed. Tenya would find him there. He would find the man that crippled his brother and stole the light from his brother's eyes, and the Hero Killer would find justice by Tenya's hand.

Fury coiled within him, white-hot and scalding as he decided, right then, that the Hero Killer would never leave Hosu City.

Izuku closed the door to the car and promptly sunk into the seat. Yamada put the keys into the ignition and started humming a calming melody over the hum of the car.

"How was Dr. Horoki?" Yamada asked. "If he's not a good fit, or you don't think talking with someone is working, tell us, okay?"

"Dr. Horoki was nice," Izuku answered, tugging on his seat belt. "His quirk allows him to do photosynthesis."

"Wow, that seems useful," Yamada commented, intrigued. "Is his skin green?"

Izuku hummed the affirmative, chewing his lip before saying, "We talked about my name, mostly. He was surprised when I told him I

wanted Hatsume to be part of my name as well."

"That makes sense, as far as he knows, Shouta and I are your only guardians." He declined to mention why they were his only guardians. Izuku would have lived with the Hatsumes, in the guest bedroom that was practically his, if not for the overarching shadows of his past. Izuku knew that he was seen as a target for the League and that was why he was with the Yamazawas. His moms said that they would take him in if it was safe, that when the League was not a problem he could move in with them if he wanted to.

It's what he dreamed of for a while, moving in with the Hatsumes. Having a real home and people to come home to. He always thought that he would find that with them, but now… now he was living with the Yamazawas and he had everything he dreamed of with them instead. It felt like he was betraying them somehow. He spent months with them, found family in them, and then he moved in with a family he had no connections to a few days prior. He had people who made breakfast for him, who learned his routines and boundaries and comforts. He had a family that he was learning the routines and boundaries and comforts of.

And it wasn't them.

Worse, he practically dumped himself into the Yamazawas' lives. At least the Hatsumes had something prepared for him- this family had to deal with him taking up space in their house and the threat of villains breaking into their house to steal him. They were spending money on *therapy* for him. A few months ago, he would have turned them down without hesitation.

Then again, a few months ago, he was concerned with how to clean the truck pieces he'd been avoiding taking apart and finding a way to lower the knockback force his gun created so that he wouldn't throw out his shoulder every time he fired his gun.

Izuku was beginning to think of the Yamazawas as family. Well, he'd been thinking of them as family since the aftermath of the USJ, honestly. He practically called Hitoshi his brother to Dr. Horoki, who repeatedly referred to Aizawa and Yamada as his guardians. And every time, that word chafed irritably in his mind. He wanted to correct him. He almost did at one point.

Parents, Izuku nearly said. *They are my parents.*

In short, he had latched onto this family very quickly. So quickly, that

he remembered what Mitsu told him about moving in after all the commotion stopped and worried about disappointing her. At first, he hadn't known why, but the reason became apparent as he thought over his emotions, staring at the ceiling of his room.

Izuku didn't want to leave.

He wanted to keep living with the Yamazawas. The realization only solidified the next morning, when they were all eating breakfast together. Yamada was singing an up-beat song, leaning against Aizawa and resting his head on Aizawa's shoulder as he prepared their breakfast. Hitoshi finished setting up the table and caught Izuku's eye. He imitated gagging and Izuku stifled a laugh, watching Hitoshi's face morph into a bright smile.

Izuku knew, right then, that leaving them wasn't really an option for him anymore. It sounded like he was complaining, but Izuku had to fight off a smile for the rest of the hour. It's not that he loves the Hatsumes any less. But Izuku's always had a large heart and plenty of love that he could never give to anyone. Now his family had grown and Izuku could receive love, too.

"Did you happen to mention Hitoshi and Mei's bickering over what combination of our names you would use?" Yamada snickered, making Izuku smile at the reminder of their argument. Having three names to combine and two competitive siblings left room for a lot of bickering over which name was best.

Izuku nodded. "He said they sounded like good siblings," he said quietly.

Yamada straightened and glanced at Izuku with shining eyes. "That's so sweet, kiddo."

Seeing him, mushy and sincere, Izuku knew that he would take good care of Shouto if he chose to intern with him. He certainly wasn't lacking when it came to taking care of Izuku or Hitoshi. Or the cats.

"Do you know what D-" Izuku's mouth shut with a sharp click. He cleared his throat. "Do you know what Aizawa is making for dinner?"

Yamada, living up to Izuku's statement of "most intelligent", caught on and flashed him a toothy grin. "Definitely your favorite food."

“Are you Midoriya?”

Izuku shrieked and Mei chucked her screwdriver at the wall where the voice came from. The wall did not have a door. Both of them turned to see a face poking out of the wall. Mei’s screwdriver was impaling his face. The person just laughed and shifted so that their face didn’t have a screwdriver inside of it, completely unharmed. Said screwdriver stayed in the wall.

“What the fuck?” They whispered in unison.

“Hi, I’m Mirio!” the disembodied face introduced. Mei tossed a bolt at him half-heartedly, both of them watching as it went through him and then dropped to the ground with a small clang. Mirio didn’t twitch. “Sorry about the scare, but I’m supposed to find Midoriya Izuku.” He didn’t look too sorry, not with the smile stuck in what looked like a permanent position on his face.

“Right,” Mei said skeptically.

“Why are you looking for me?” Izuku asked, glancing to the side to make sure his gun was within reach. Izuku was pretty sure this guy was just a student but caution had to be exercised when your childhood friend could pop in at any moment to nab you.

“Give me minute, I’ll come in,”

“He couldn’t have just done that in the first place?” Mei muttered after he disappeared through the wall.

Mirio walked in and Izuku shared a glance with Mei. “This was not the physique I pictured for your face,” Izuku confessed, craning his head to meet Mirio’s eyes as he stopped in front of Izuku’s workstation.

When he continued staring at him, Izuku cleared his throat. “You were told to find me?”

Mirio nodded sharply. “Sir would like you to intern with him, if you haven’t already turned in your forms.” He blinked, adding, “Sir Nighteye, that is.”

The wrench in Izuku’s hand made a loud bang as his hands abruptly dropped to the table. His attention was fully shifted to Mirio, abandoning his goggles as he stared at Mirio. “Sir-” His voice cracked, hoarse and unbelieving. Mei snickered as she watched him flounder.

“Sir Nighteye?”
As in the man whose quirk was unknown, the man who worked investigations and walked the line of being a Limelight and Underground hero. The only person aside from David Shield to ever be All Might’s sidekick.

Mirio seemed as amused at his reaction as Mei, though he was more subtle about it. “Yup,” Mirio confirmed cheerfully. “Sir would like to see what he can teach you and since I’m not going to his agency this time, he’ll want someone around.”

Izuku had been planning on interning with Aizawa and Hitoshi, but- Oh shit, he was going to scream. Sir *fucking* Nighteye sent an intern to *poach* him. Him! Izuku! He wondered how he caught Sir Nighteye’s attention. What had he done that made him send an actual person to tell him to pick his internship?

Izuku told Mirio he would accept Sir Nighteye’s offer.

Hitoshi grumbled about being ditched and dying at Aizawa’s wicked, ruthless hands alone, opposed to having Izuku suffer with him, but there were no other complaints. Mirio ended up asking him to meet up before their internships started for some consulting about his quirk. Breaking his mask of a constant smile, he acted more skittish than Izuku had seen him during their entire interaction as he told Izuku that his quirk had taken on a new aspect that he couldn’t control yet. Izuku nodded along, curious about what sort of new facet Mirio could have discovered in Permeation.

Inside the gym Mirio reserved, Izuku watched Mirio demonstrate his original abilities, scribbling down notes as he watched Mirio swing his arm through a punching bag.

“I’ve always been able to do that, but this,” he showed Izuku a ball, which promptly dropped through Mirio’s hand and through the floor. “I’ve never been able to do that before.”

“So, your quirk evolved to more than just self-permeation,” Izuku muttered. “Does it only work on inanimate objects or people, too? Is it like your self-permeation, where you can make only part of it intangible or does it have to be the whole object? Could you use it indirectly? If you touched the floor, could you make me fall through it? Do you need to be in physical contact with whatever it is you’re

permeating?"

Mirio was quailing noticeably by the end of his tangent, his nerves reappearing. "I'm not finished," He cleared his throat, like he was trying to brace himself. "I also now have… super strength."

"Super strength," Izuku echoed as his thought process was derailed. "Permeation, the ability to move through solid objects, has mutated into *super strength?"*

"I-I know," he chuckled, watching Izuku's face twist in confusion. "And I'm more worried about that aspect because it tends to fracture my bones."

"It does *what,"*

Instead of answering, Mirio brandished his arm and Izuku watched in fascination as glowing red lines formed along his forearm. The glow went away, and Mirio offered him a placating smile. "That's about all I can do without fracturing my arm."

"And you can do this with your whole body?" Mirio nodded. Izuku tapped the end of his pencil against his notebook. "When did this appear?"

"Around the same time as the new aspect of Permeation."

Izuku let out a long sigh that trailed into a groan-like sound, then collected himself. "Do you have a way of using the super strength without hurting yourself? Can you lower the power output?"

Mirio scrunched his face in concentration and the glowing lines came back. Slowly, he wiggled his fingers. A grin spread across his face and he whooped, jabbing his glowing fist and creating a gust of wind that knocked Izuku off his feet. Izuku stared at Mirio in bewilderment as he rushed to help him up. What the hell kind of mutation gave him the power to create air force as strong as that with a tiny *jab?*

"You're only using your arm," Izuku said once he steadied himself. At Mirio's confused glance, he elaborated. "Now that you aren't at risk of breaking your whole body, have you thought about spreading all the power throughout your whole body instead of just your arm?"

The look on Mirio's face told him no.

Ten seconds later, Mirio had white lightning crackling around him and

Izuku wanted to have an aneurysm.

“Oh my god!” Mirio gasped, flexing his hands. “It worked! I’m glowing!”

A half-hearted chortle was forced out of Izuku’s throat as he watched the third year jump around like an excitable puppy. A supercharged puppy, who just broke the dynamics of quirk development. After thirty minutes of Mirio becoming accustomed to being supercharged, he muttered something about “fifteen percent” and Izuku narrowed his eyes.

Fifteen percent of *what,* exactly, if he could already create craters in the floor just by hopping around?

As they walked out, Izuku gave up trying to hold his tongue. “It’s weird that your quirk was able to do this. The additional aspect of Permeation I can make sense of, but super strength is a whole other ballpark. It’s like you have an entirely new quirk somehow.” He tried not to let his envy bleed into his tone but it must have, since Mirio’s body stiffened. Izuku winced, wishing for more tact.

It’s just… Mirio was so *lucky* to have two quirks that would only boost his journey through heroism. Sure, Permeation was slightly horrifying if you gave it a minute of thought and this new super strength would literally break him if he lost control, but they would both be adored by fans. They were nothing like Izuku or Hitoshi’s quirks.

Izuku’s quirk tugged on his senses and he glanced at Mirio. “What’s wrong?”

His head snapped up, his alarm easy to read in his eyes. “Nothing’s wrong!”

Izuku raised his eyebrow, waiting for a real answer.

Mirio caved after a few seconds in silence. “I’m interning with an old hero, Gran Torino, so that he can help me get a handle on this new part of my quirk. I have a new mentor with a quirk that’s similar, but he directed me to Gran Torino, saying that he might be more helpful.” He shuddered. “He was scared of him, though, so now *I’m* scared of a man I haven't met yet.”

“This mentor of yours sounds kind of sucky,” Izuku commented, earning an offended look from Mirio. “Look, from what you’ve told me, he met you, said he could help, then handed you off to some

grouchy old man."

"He's- He's not *sucky,"* Mirio sputtered.

"I mean, even if he hadn't ever heard of a bone breaking quirk, shouldn't this man have at least given you a way to not hurt yourself?"

"He told me to go to you!" Mirio shouted, silencing Izuku in an instant. "He told me that while he might not know what to do, that you had a head for analysis and that you could probably help me more than him. So, don't call him a bad mentor."

Izuku agreed easily enough.

"Hey," Izuku said, breaking the silence and raising his hand for a high five. "Welcome to the detrimental quirk club."

"If you're dead before I get back, I get your nyan cat hoodie," Izuku told Hitoshi.

"Touch my hoodie and you'll be the dead one," he threatened, flicking Izuku's nose.

Batting his hand away, Izuku gave him a wry smile. "At least you have a base to build on,"

"A base doesn't help me when Dad plans to murder me through an intensive training regimen."

Snickering, Izuku reached out to hug him, before stopping himself. Izuku's movements faltered as he met Hitoshi's eyes, asking for permission. Hitoshi clicked his tongue in mild annoyance and pulled him into a tight hug. Izuku shuddered in his arms, pressing his face into Hitoshi's shoulder.

"Short," Hitoshi snorted.

"Beanpole," Izuku retorted.

"Broccoli head,"

"Troll droll wannabe,"

“I heard you almost called him Dad,” Hitoshi said, making Izuku choke and turn pink. “Say it to his face, I want to see if his reaction is better than Mitsu’s when you call her mom.”

“You’re being mean,” Izuku muttered into his shoulder.

“You just called me a *troll doll wannabe,”*

Yamada’s voice called for Izuku to bring his things to the door so they could leave for the train station. At the door, Hitoshi pushed a groggy Aizawa in front of him, giving him an enthusiastic thumbs up behind his back. Yamada looked between them in confusion.

Before he could rethink his decision, Izuku shot forward and rammed into Aizawa, wrapping his arms around him in a tight hug and squeaking out, “B-Bye, Dad!” before bolting from the house. Yamada let out a surprised shriek-laugh, while Hitoshi simply began laughing at however Aizawa reacted.

The ride to the train station began with Izuku’s nervous energy bouncing everywhere.

“He liked it,” Yamada said with a grin. “So don’t worry about anything like that.”

When they arrived, Izuku hugged him goodbye, too. “Bye, Pops,” he whispered into his leather jacket.

He held him tighter. “See ya, little listener.”

The first day of his internship went well enough until he met Sir Nighteye. The train ride had been okay, aside from the stiffness of sitting for hours. Bubble Girl and Centipeder gave him a tour before dropping him off at Sir Nighteye’s office. A sudden sense of foreboding befell him, his muscles tensing at the change in atmosphere.

“Come in,” a stern voice commanded.

Izuku stepped cautiously into the room and took a second to take in the sheer amount of All Might merchandise in the room. Posters, globes, action figures, they were present and shining like they had only been taken out of their boxes a minute ago. Crap, was that poster from the Bronze Age? No, the design of his costume was all off. Even

his pose was weird, like he was supposed to be popping out of the background...

Oh my god, Izuku screamed internally. *That's the limited edition Silver Age-*

Izuku cleared his throat and forcibly turned his head away from the poster that was worth more than his entire life's savings. "Hello," he bowed, thankful that his voice was steady. "I'm-"

"I know who you are," Sir Nighteye said, eyeing him like he was some sort of stain marring the beauty of his office. Izuku's hope dwindled at the contempt in his eyes, his hackles rising as he straightened to meet Sir Nighteye's cold gaze. He should have stayed in Mustafa with Hitoshi. Sure, he would be miserable, but at least he would be respected. This fanboy in a suit looked like he wanted to tear him into tiny pieces and burn his remains for daring to stand in his agency, even though he was fucking *invited.*

"What can you do for me?"

Oh, is he for real? This is what they mean when they say to never meet your heroes. Because they turn out to be bitches a bit too big for their britches. This was like meeting All Might all over again, except this piss-eyed, slender-man reject purposefully took time out of both of their days to insult him.

Someone's bitter their golden boy found a new mentor.

Said golden boy could be his only way to his cold, clairvoyant heart, though. Izuku wanted to see what this Trelawney wannabe had to say about him after he tried to make himself useful. "I can give you my notes on Mirio's new quirk." Because he obviously wanted Mirio here instead of him and maybe Mirio's new mentor would them switch because Izuku didn't plan on staying here for more than ten minutes after their conversation ended.

Too soon, Izuku realized, watching Nighteye's body become rigid. His eyes narrowed behind his glasses. *I spoke way too soon.*

"Mirio told you about the quirk?" *Well, fuck you, too,* Izuku quipped. It's almost like Mirio needed help with an insane quirk enhancement and reasonably thought to go to the resident quirk analysis.

His real words to Yaoi Hands were, "Yes, getting a boost to his own quirk and an entirely new one is something you want consulting on."

Wrong thing. Wrong fucking thing to say. Nighteye stepped back, shocked, and then Izuku was being dragged out of the office by his arm, listening to Nighteye telling Bubble Girl to bring Izuku's things back to the lobby. Izuku wasn't the one muttering for once. Nighteye was saying things under his breath, anger lacing his bitten out thoughts and tightening the grip he had on Izuku's arm.

Something about, "Mirio," and "thought he knew how to keep a secret,". Izuku listened to the pieces of thought that made it through and almost ripped his arm out of his hand out of sheer disbelief. He expected Mirio to deal with this *alone?* He expected Mirio to figure out how to not hurt himself through trial and error like some dumbass? What kind of mentor expected that of their own student?

"Oh, and, Midoriya?"

Izuku's head snapped up, meeting Nighteye's cold glare with a scowl of his own.

"If you breathe a word of what you know to *anyone,* your hero career ends then and there."

And on that pleasant note, they left the agency.

The silence of the train ride was not something Izuku was inclined to break. The pure shock radiating off of Nighteye unnerved Izuku. Why was it so important no one knew about Mirio's quirk development? Was it because of how the appearance of super strength defied what scientists came up with for the "rules" of quirks? Quirk Science was a joke! Like all aspects of science if it can't be proven, there's discourse. So, what if this causes some more?

If anything, this only served to fuel the popular theory of quirk singularity. A nonsensical strength quirk that was powerful enough to fracture, and probably shatter, someone's bones when used recklessly. It was flashy enough for people to like it though, with sparkling red lines and glowing lighting streaking across Mirio's body. Fifteen percent, Mirio said as he powered up. But that measly percent knocked Izuku off his feet and the punch wasn't even thrown in his direction. That kind of strength, the kind that created winds and could potentially level a building, Izuku had only ever seen it in… in…

Izuku blinked.

He had only ever seen All Might use the kind of strength Mirio had.

Without much concentrated thought on what he was searching for, Izuku pulled out his rickety phone and searched for quirks like Mirio's. Dual quirks, sudden developments, quirks with multiple, seemingly unconnected, facets. Then he read the articles, the statements. He made sense of the science and scrolled through the pages until he stopped dead at the sight of one photo. It was attached to a small local news segment, unassuming and likely wouldn't be looked at twice by anyone else.

A young girl with black hair strung into a high ponytail grinned at him. A boy with off-white hair stood grouchily beside her, looking away from the camera.

Shimura Nana, local student, discovers a new side to her quirk!

Said side was an extreme boost to her quirk, Float, and a sudden strength. Her strength was nothing super, not enough to warrant being called anything but a good training regimen, but Izuku could feel himself getting close to something. He looked up the girl's name, unsurprised to find her hero name, and followed her through her career. Nothing out of the ordinary, she was a great hero with a few more notable fights and rescues to her name. She frequently worked with another hero, *Gran goddamn Torino,* the same boy from the earlier photo.

He dug deeper, the unpleasant thought of *curiosity killed the cat* running through his head, some instinct telling him to turn away before it was too late.

The next photo he saw made his heart stutter.

Too late.

Shimura, in her hero costume, held up a young boy by the scruff of his middle school uniform. She smiled mischievously and the boy, who remained unnamed, gave a lop-sided, nervous grin.

All Might.

Did Izuku actually stumble upon the most guarded secret of his generation? No, he calls bullshit. No way he found a multigenerational

quirk passed down to All Might. No way his luck was *that* bad. Evidence so far pointed to the existence of a quirk that could be passed down. A quirk that stockpiled power to the point where Mirio was fracturing his bones. How the hell does a strength related quirk even get passed down? Did Izuku even want to know the answer to his questions?

Regrettably, yes.

Izuku put his phone away and let his thoughts marinate in his findings. The train rolled to a stop and Nighteye stood, snapping at Izuku to follow him. Izuku discreetly pulled out his phone and texted Hitoshi *(I'm not in danger but I'm going to destroy my phone)* and pressed the kill switch Mei installed when she began making him a new phone. She said that it was so she could get rid of his phone quickly, and the kill switch was serving its purpose. For extra demolition, Izuku broke it in half and crushed his phone beneath his feet, mourning the upgrades he had given it.

They stopped travelling when they reached a dingy house. Nighteye promptly began banging on the door, shouting, "Let us in!" without regard for the apparent residents of the house who were most likely sleeping. You know, since it was the middle of the night. Izuku yawned, wishing for the hundredth time today that he interned with Aizawa and Hitoshi. He would be exhausted, but at least he would be asleep by now.

Light flooded the general area once the door opened. Mirio stood in the entryway, blearily staring at them in blatant confusion. "Sir?" he turned, meeting Izuku's eyes. He waved at Mirio with an expression he hoped would convey his displeasure. "Midoriya?"

Nighteye shoved past Mirio into the building, scowling at his student. "I cannot believe you told someone!" he scolded harshly. "We told you-"

"He just wanted to consult!" Izuku spat, almost growling at this supposed *mentor.* Mirio didn't deserve this shit for asking Izuku for help. He hadn't told him anything about a mantle or a quirk being passed on. He planted himself between Mirio and Nighteye. "He just wanted help controlling his quirk!"

"Sir," Mirio began.

"Would all of you *quit your yapping?"* yelled a new person. A tiny old man in pajamas stood on the table and glared murder at Nighteye.

Gran Torino, Izuku realized, glancing back at Mirio. “Nighteye, what the hell are you doing here? And with the kid?”

“He *knows,* Gran.” He stiffened at the ominous statement, his gaze zeroing in on Izuku.

Faster than Izuku could react to, Gran Torino was upon him. The breath was stolen from his lungs as Gran Torino’s feet made contact with his chest and slammed him into the ground.

“Gran Torino-” Mirio started, obviously alarmed.

“What did he tell you?”

“Nothing,” Izuku said through gritted teeth as he wheezed for air.

His eyebrows rose. “We both know that’s bullshit,”

“I didn’t know shit about any secret before Sir Nighteye dragged me here!” Izuku snarled, voice cracking. “Mirio wanted to consult with me about how to control his quirk. I didn’t ask him about where it came from and he didn’t tell me.”

Gran Torino relaxed, lifting most of the weight of his foot off of his chest. “So, you don’t know what we’re talking about,”

Izuku braced for pain. “I do, actually.”

He coughed when Gran Torino’s foot knocked the air out of him again.

“You should really-” Izuku heaved in a gasp. “Clear the internet of evidence. If I can find something, any dedicated person could.”

Gran Torino stepped away with a sigh. Mirio rushed to his side and helped him to his feet, muttering apologies as Izuku winced from the pain in his ribs. “Toshinori did say you were smart,” he conceded.

“Who?” Izuku croaked.

“Gran,” Nighteye said warningly.

“All Might,” Gran Torino revealed. “What do you know?”

“I don’t know where it started but I know it has to do with your friend,” he said to Gran Torino. “And I know she gave it to All Might, who passed it to Mirio.”

“And how did you find this information?” Nighteye questioned suspiciously.

Izuku gave him a flat stare. “Shimura Nana, local student, discovers a new side to her quirk,” he quoted. “There wasn’t a spontaneous bone breaking quirk, but the quirk boost and subsequent strength that was mentioned was enough of a lead for me to look into it. There’s a photo of her and a certain blonde middle schooler that sort of cemented what my theory was.”

“I’m calling Toshinori,” Nighteye said defeatedly.

“Don’t bother.” Gran Torino waved him off. “It’s the middle of the night and the kid already knew a chunk of this.”

Izuku’s brain took a second to fill in what he meant. “His injury?” he guessed, waving his hand over his abdomen where All Might’s injury was. Gran Torino nodded.

They awkwardly sat in silence, none of their unfortunate souls knowing how to continue.

“I need to make a call,” Izuku realized. His family had no way to contact him and they had no Idea where he was. Who knows how freaked out they were over his cryptic message? “Can I use someone’s phone?”

Mirio nodded immediately but Nighteye narrowed his eyes. “Who are you calling?”

Izuku bit down on a snarl. “I destroyed my phone because I didn’t want anyone using my trail to find something. You’re the one who decided it was a good idea to haul me here, and now I can’t contact my family. They don’t know where I am-” Izuku blinked, then frowned, still glaring. “I don’t know where I am, either, for that matter. Just let me call them.”

Nighteye held his gaze. “You can’t tell them-”

“Do you think I’m some stupid blabbermouth?” Izuku snapped. “I know how to keep secrets, Sir.”

“Kid,” Gran Torino called. “I’ve got a landline upstairs for you to use.”

Upstairs, Izuku sat in a dim hallway. Voices travelled from beneath him, the others evidently still talking about something. Though the

wood floors were hard and the air was cold, Izuku's eyes drooped. Instead of giving into his body's wishes for sleep, he dialled Hitoshi's number. The phone rang for a few seconds before he picked up.

"Nakamura whore house," Hitoshi droned. *"You got the dough, we got the hoe."*

Izuku chuckled. "I don't think Hana would let me pet her for more than five seconds if I bribed her with all the treats in the world,"

The other end of the line quieted before Hitoshi said, *"Izuku?"*

"Did Aizawa kill you yet?" he asked instead of replying.

Muffled shouting broke out on Hitoshi's end. *"I'm handing you over to Dad,"* He said, before more shuffling occurred.

"Are you safe?" Aizawa said urgently.

"My ribs are bruised and I accidentally uncovered a secret that could crumble society," Izuku huffed, hugging himself with his free arm to warm himself up. "People should really stop trying to crush my ribs."

"Where are you?" Aizawa sounded concerned. *"I can bring you home,"*

"I don't actually know where Nighteye took me," Izuku confessed. "I guess I should have paid more attention to where we were going."

"Sir Nighteye knows about this?" Oh, now he sounds pissed. Cool, Nighteye deserves to be yelled at some more.

"Yeah, he was mad at me and now I am in Gran Torino's house," Izuku sighed. "I'm tired," he said quietly. "I should have interned with you. You would have let me sleep."

"Did Sir Nighteye hurt you?"

"Hm?" Izuku hummed, half-asleep, before shaking his head. "No, Gran Torino was the one who bruised my ribs. He thought I was going to spill the beans on the big secret."

"I'll ask again, and you better give me a straight answer," Aizawa said. *"Are you* safe?"

"I think so," Izuku said. "Mirio and Gran Torino seem to trust me, so I don't think they will let Nighteye be nasty to me anymore."

“They better not,” he grumbled. *“Can you hand the phone to one of the adults, Izuku? I need to have some words with them.”*

“The landline’s cord only stretches a few feet, and I don’t really want to see Nighteye glare at me anymore today.” Izuku played with the cord and chuckled darkly. “Man, it’s true when they say don’t meet your heroes. First All Might, now this.”

“All Might?”

“Well, I met him after nearly being murdered and taken as someone’s sock puppet, uncovered a different, but slightly related secret, and had my dreams crushed.” He clicked his tongue in annoyance. “Then again, that day was a shitshow of horrendous luck and terrible decisions on all fronts.”

“A sock puppet?”

“He called me a meatsuit when he tried to kill me, but same difference,” Izuku shrugged, shivering at the reminder of sludge forcing itself down his throat.

“When was this?” Aizawa said.

“A year or so before the entrance exam. Ten months, maybe? After I used my quirk and, you know, died, I lost most of my awareness.”

Silence reigned on the other end of the line.

“That sounds like one hell of a day,” Hitoshi said, breaking the silence. *“How are you, uh, alive, though?”*

“Kacchan resuscitated me,” Izuku bit his lip, a sour feeling flooding him at his inadvertent slip up. He was prone to being loose-lipped when he was tired and calling Bakugo 'Kacchan’ was one of the slip ups that hadn’t happened in a while.

“Who?” Aizawa asked.

“Nevermind!” Izuku said, forcibly changing the subject. “I don’t think they will allow me to leave, so you don’t need to come to get me.”

“They can’t force you to stay,” Aizawa growled. *“Say the word and we’re there.”*

He yawned, letting his head knock against the wall softly. “I think I’ll be okay,” he murmured. “I should probably build a new phone soon.”

“Just let us buy you one!” Hitoshi said, almost pleading.

“Expensive,” Izuku said as an argument, his hold on the phone becoming loose. Knees to his chest, Izuku listened to their voices.

“Are you tired?” Hitoshi asked.

He hummed without opening his eyes. “G’night,”

“Night,” they both said.

Chapter End Notes

What should his new name be? Hamazawa? Yamazawa-Hatsume? Hatsume-Yamazawa? Yamatsuzawa? help meh plz

On another note- 32K HITS aaaaahhhhh thank you so muuuuuccchhh

Internships

Chapter Notes

40k! Thank you so much!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Mirai considered himself a logical man.

It was rational to aid Toshinori in his search for a successor. He found Mirio, a boy who could carry Toshinori's power with the mettle to become another Symbol of Peace. With a bit of training, of course.

When the boy was ready, he suggested him to his estranged friend, reaching out for the first time in years to give him the perfect vessel for One for All.

Toshinori turned him down. He made a noise of disagreement, saying that he found a boy, *the* boy. All he needed to do was find him and offer the power and-

Mirai didn't listen to the rest, pinching the bridge of his nose in exasperation. Did he really intend to spend any more time searching for someone he didn't have the slightest clue about, when he offered someone amazing on a silver platter? It infuriated him to no end that Toshinori wanted to make this decision based on a heat of the moment *feeling.* Gran Torino only made him seethe more, his resolve to make his old student find the boy enabling him.

This cultivated power that had been passed on generation after generation needed somebody who could handle it. Somebody who could handle the title of Number One. How could such an important role be given out to a child that friend had only known for a few brief minutes? Could neither of them see the foolishness in that?

For months, those bitter feelings stewed, swirling like a cyclone, until Toshinori contacted him. He asked after Mirio.

Before he knew it, One for All was in the hands of Mirio, transferred.

Gran Torino made his position on the matter blatantly clear but, after the Sports Festival, he said he would help Mirio train with One for All.

When the quirk settled and Mirio began fracturing his bones,

Toshinori sent him to a first-year at UA, one Midoriya Izuku. The analyst, if he recalled correctly. His notebooks made a splash in the hero community. Also, his mind reminded him amusedly, the boy who spoke out during his speech in the first years' Festival. Toshinori's mentor's demeanor soured, yet brightened, at the mention of the boy. He inquired about the boy and learned that…

This was the boy Toshinori had turned Mirio down for?

He scoffed to himself, wondering what made his old friend believe that this boy could have been the next Symbol of Peace. He could be a great hero, sure, but with the way he worked and acted, Mirai could only see the boy working out of the Limelight.

He put out an internship offer and sent Mirio after the boy, if only to find out for himself if the boy truly deserved the kind of praise Toshinori gave him.

He was rewarded with a deadpan stare at his first statement.

The answer, though, sent his heart hammering against his chest.

"Yeah, I mean, getting a boost to his own quirk and, like, an entirely new one is something you want consulting on."

Mirio told him. *Mirio told him.* It ran through his head on repeat throughout their ride to Gran Torino's house. Was this because Toshinori said that he should go to the boy for consulting? Mirai thought that Mirio possessed enough sense to come up with a cover story, not spill the whole damn secret!

And the boy. Midoriya spoke so *casually* about One for All. It infuriated Mirai to think of all the things Toshinori relayed to him about the student. His prowess in his studies, his practical thinking during hero training. He believed his student to be *humble.* He said that the boy shunned away from the barest compliment when people caught him off guard.

Mirai couldn't believe any of them. He banged on Gran Torino's door, a half-asleep Mirio asking him what was wrong. Yes, because what could *possibly* be wrong?

Apparently, he should have given his student more credit. He should have waited and listened before making assumptions on both of them. Now Midoriya actually knew about One for All and he had been the one to reveal it.

That night, he lay on a couch that could not fit the lengths of his legs and could not sleep. When Midoriya wandered into the kitchen, groggy with sleep, he had done a great deal of thinking.

Mirai had seen his file, had read up on the on-going search and investigation of his parents after he knew his identity. The boy survived, alone, for eight years in a tiny apartment with no one else to turn to until a couple of heroes had taken him in. Perhaps Mirai's deduction of his character was too biased by his resentfulness.

Mirio looked especially distressed after Midoriya left to call his family, the heroes, because he apparently destroyed his phone to avoid anyone tracing his digital steps. His student eyed Midoriya's chest, no doubt noting the rasping he took on after Gran Torino pinned him to the ground. He avoided his eyes when he explained and that hurt more than he prepared for.

He tracked the way Midoriya's hand rubbed tenderly at his chest, wincing at the pressure, and something regretful curled in his stomach. The moment he shifted on the couch, Midoriya whipped around to face him, alarm clear in his wide eyes. When they landed on him, his expressful eyes blinked before draining of everything, becoming blank. A mask.

The thing in his gut churned at the sight.

They sat together at the table in silence. Mirai resisted the urge to twitch at the awkwardness as Midoriya intertwined his fingers and slowly raised his gaze to Mirai's.

"You look like you want to say something," Midoriya murmured. "I won't tell anyone about the quirk, if that's what's got you thinking so hard."

Was he truly so easy to read? "While that is appreciated, I was actually attempting to figure out how to apologize to you."

He stilled, his gaze flashing with something that disappeared so fast, Mirai barely caught it. Something hopeful. He waited for him to continue, expectant.

"When I offered you an internship, I had already made up my mind about you. I interrupted what should have been your learning experience and dragged you here." He thought of their rushed exit, the bag he grabbed. "To avoid spending another few hours wasted on trains, we might as well stay here. But while we are, I'd like to

actually teach you some things about the less advertised aspects of hero work."

"Such as?" His facade of tonelessness melted before his eyes, opening into an expression that reminded him strikingly of Toshinori when the conversations between them had been lighter. It was a look Mirio wore, too, even now.

Mirai unzipped his backpack, pulling out a thick binder. "Paperwork."

Sorahiko sighed deeply after he situated Nighteye on a couch that was much too small for him. More than ready to hit the hay, he walked back into the upstairs room to check on Midoriya. The boy had fallen asleep curled against the wall, the phone hanging from its wire by his head. The bags under the kid's eyes darkened under the lack of light in the room, his face far more youthful than it was when he was awake.

With the shit this brat pulled in the Sports Festival, paired with Toshinori's confession, he had almost sent off a second internship offer. He possessed the physical attributes of a hero and he lived up to his own words, something Sorahiko respected. In the end, he never sent out the email. He was an old hero, retired, and there was no point in sending out an invite that would simply be overlooked.

Nighteye showing up in the middle of the night hollering at his doorstep was infuriating enough. But when he brought the kid in, the one that Toshinori spoke of with melancholy tones and a self-deprecating edge, and revealed One for All, Sorahiko had been down to throw hands with that impatient, assuming prick.

Sorahiko didn't hesitate to tell Toshinori that no matter what Nighteye thought, One for All was more than just some *quirk*. It was *Nana's*. The mantle Toshinori intended to pass to him was only as big as Mirio would make it for himself but Nighteye and his fanboy-obsessed self pushed, saying that this kid was the best vessel for One for All.

A vessel.

When his old student confessed to his search for the boy with the odd quirk, the boy who *he* thought could be the next Symbol of Peace, Sorahiko stood and said that he should keep searching. Because giving One for All to someone had to be a decision driven by *feeling*. It was

not some job that you could apply for. Toshinori could never choose someone based off of how they were on paper.

Then, something happened and he agreed to meet with Mirio after the Sports Festival. The smug expression on Nighteye's face made Sorahiko wish he could bash his face in.

Toshinori divulged, after much coaxing, that he found the boy and he promptly whacked his former student on the head because *what the hell-*

Crushed dreams. Lost trust. His power was diminishing and they didn't have the time to build up that kind of faith. *Time.* That was the factor that inevitably made Toshinori give One for All to that promising student of Nighteye's instead of the one he felt was the one. What pissed Sorahiko off was that he hadn't even offered the boy the power, deciding that he would not accept it and moving on like that had to be the end of that path.

It wasn't that Mirio acted like a brat or that he didn't deserve One for All, no, that boy acted like a saint, but now there would always be that nagging in the back of their heads, the *what if's* of what might have been.

Morning came with a pleasant surprise, though.

"So, I need to write a detailed report in this section? What if I need more paper?"

Sorahiko almost laughed but maintained his silence, wondering where this would go.

Nighteye sighed and he imagined the man was rubbing his temples. "If more paper is required for you to make an adequate report, then you may staple it in with the other papers. Remember to fill out your information here, and please do work on your handwriting, your teachers may find it alright but if you turn in papers with unneat scribbles, I will throw it out."

"Hey, now," the boy scoffed in mock offense. "You try teaching yourself how to write and see if you end up with anything other than my semi-neat scribbles."

There was a pause from Nighteye, likely processing Midoriya's statement the same way Sorahiko did. "You taught yourself how to write? What were your parents and educators doing?"

“Being neglectful,” Midoriya piped nonchalantly.

Another pause. A tap on his table. “This is where another signature goes. We’ll have to work on that, too, though it is better than your regular writing.”

“I used to sell scrap metal and reusable parts, so I hope my signature's decent, otherwise my moms have been lying to me.”

“I thought you said you were staying with Eraserhead and Present Mic.”

“Oh, they’re my dads, too.”

Sorahiko heard Nighteye shift in his seat and sigh in exasperation. “Is everything you say going to lead to a whole other group of questions?”

“Yes,” Midoriya answered without hesitation.

He walked into the room, not bothering to hide his amusement. “I see you two have made up.” Nighteye looked tempted to break his usual composure to slump in his chair. “How long have the two of you been awake?”

“About two hours,” Nighteye replied.

Sorahiko’s budding hope withered slightly. He narrowed his eyes at Nighteye. “You only let him sleep for three hours?”

For some reason, the man looked just as miffed as he was. “Midoriya came down all on his own, Gran. I thought we might as well do something useful.”

Midoriya flashed them both a bright, nervous smile. “It’s hard for me to sleep here. I’ve never had to use the train system on my own or for as long as we did and I’ve never been outside of Musutafu, either.”

Nighteye had the grace to look contrite. “Again, I apologize for my behavior. This was supposed to be your internship and my assumptions have uprooted you.”

“Maybe I can help Mirio out some more while we’re here,” Midoriya offered, putting his forefinger and thumb to his chin. “I *did* choose your agency to focus on more papery things anyways, since I don’t plan on going Limelight.”

“Will you tell anyone about Mirio’s quirk?” he asked suddenly.

“No, sir,” the kid replied immediately.

Sorahiko hummed in approval. No hesitation. The kid looked honest.

“I’ll get Mirio. Don’t give him ways to destroy my house,”

Ochako flipped her phone closed and sighed. Waiting sucked. She thought that the hero she chose would have been all over her case to be moving around or training but so far, all she had done was sit in a lounge without any instructions.

Maybe she should text Iida to try and talk with him again. He had been closed off lately, not that she could blame him, but she wanted him to know that if he needed to, she was available to talk. Just the thought of something like that happening to her parents sent shivers down her spine. Medical bills would be hell, surely, but Iida wouldn’t have to worry about anything like that, thankfully.

“In you go, newbie!”

Startled by the sudden influx of noise, Ochako whipped her head around in time to watch Mirko shove Bakugo into the room and slam the door. He turned back without taking notice of her to pound at the door in a familiar display of aggression.

“Fucking rabbit, get back here!”

Before he could let out an explosion and possibly be forced to reimburse the hero, Ochako said, “Bakugo?”

He twisted around to see her, his mouth curled in a snarl. “Round Face, the fuck’re you doing at my internship?”

She scoffed, standing up from the chair. “I think it’s pretty obvious that this is my internship, too, Bakugo.”

“Why’re you here, huh? Thought you wanted to be a damn Rescue hero,”

“I overheard Dekiru talking about why you should come here and thought I could benefit from it, too.” She explained. “I need to be able to fight and work on my own. Mirko can help me with both.”

“Of course you’d listen to fucking Deku,” Bakugo growled. “Everyone thinks he’s so damn smart.”

“You, too, I guess.” Ochako snorted at his furious glare. “What? You took his advice, didn’t you?”

“I came here because *I* wanted to, got it, Round Face?” He stepped closer but she stayed put, not one to fall for his intimidation. “Deku’s got no fucking part in my decision.”

The door flew open, both of them dropping into fighting stances, and Mirko stepped in. “Now that you two have been acquainted, we can start training.” Her feral grin made Ochako think that maybe she should have just gone with Gunhead, like she originally wanted to. “Get changed, be on the mats in three minutes!”

Future Ochako would reap the benefits of their first day with Mirko but Present Ochako was nauseous and kneeling by the toilet, regretting her life.

At least Bakugo had been taken down a notch, his personality somehow a recipe for the perfect kind of chaotic relationship between himself and Mirko. They had been put against each other to spar several times and each of them were won by Bakugo, much to her chagrin. Mirko didn’t seem overly concerned about it, though, so Ochako would simply work harder. Plus Ultra, right?

She collapsed back onto the chair in the lounge when she stopped dry heaving, content to stare at the ceiling while thinking about the day’s events. What could she do better? Bakugo’s quirk obviously held the superiority in this situation. His quirk was combat-oriented and so was he. Should Ochako be more aggressive?

“You need to be faster,” Bakugo muttered from the opposite side of the room.

“What?” She sat up, ignoring the way her insides roiled, unsure if she heard him right. Was Bakugo, Lord Explosion Murder, giving her advice?

“You fucking heard me, Round Face, get faster. You’re too damn slow and you need some shit to throw when there’s nothing around for you to float.”

He was *totally* giving her advice. “Thanks,” she said sincerely. “You telegraph your moves.” Ochako tacked on after a moment.

“Hah?” There he goes again, back to being a rabid dog.

“Most of your moves are too quick for me to get around but you telegraph your moves. Someone faster than me could take advantage of that.”

“Fuck off,”

She laughed, sinking back into her chair. “Just saying, I bet Dekiru could give you a run for your money.”

“The fuck does that mean? Think he’s better than me?”

She scoffed, rolling her eyes. “Don’t put words in my mouth, Bakugo. What I mean, is that he’s fast. Everyone saw how he managed to avoid Iida in the Festival and how he waited out Tetsutetsu. And if Dekiru could do it, I don’t think it would be that hard for a villain to, either.”

“Keep mentioning him and see what fucking happens, Round Face.” Bakugo scowled.

“What’s up with you and him, anyway?” She inquired, completely disregarding his petulant warning. “What’s your beef?”

When Bakugo didn’t immediately tell her off, she knew she must have hit a nerve. “None of your damn business,” he finally muttered.

“He’s my friend, so if you have a problem with him, it is my business.”

“You don’t know shit!” He snarled loudly, standing from his seat to glare at her. “Just shut up-”

“Time for bed, kits!” Mirko interrupted enthusiastically. Her toothy grin didn’t falter at the clear animosity filling the room. When neither of them moved after a couple of seconds, Mirko grabbed Ochako off of her seat, holding her in a bridal carry.

“I said move!” She hollered, charging at Bakugo. Ochako was abruptly switched to dangling from one of her arms, Bakugo fighting against Mirko when she inevitably caught him.

Both of them were dumped into one room unceremoniously and the door slammed shut, enclosing them in a spacious area with plain beds at the opposite ends of the room.

“Good night, I guess.” Ochako yawned, dropping their previous subject for now.

Bakugo stayed silent.

Their first day would be a prelude to an even more terrible second day and Future Ochako would pat Past Ochako on the back for thinking that it couldn’t get any worse.

“And here is where I host my radio show!” Present Mic said, energetically gesturing to the unfamiliar section of his agency.

Shouto cautiously stepped into the area, unsure, at this point, if someone would jump out from some hidden corner to greet him. When no one appeared from the abyss to scream at him with a blinding smile, he relaxed some of the stiffness in his posture, glancing back at Present Mic.

“Alright, little listener,” Present Mic clapped his hands together. “Now that the tour’s done, we’re going to work on something every hero should know.”

Intrigued, Shouto followed his sensei down the unfamiliar halls of his agency. They stopped in a large room that looked like a lounge room, a wide flat-screen TV facing the plush couches. He sat down in the center of one at Present Mic’s gesturing, the cushions soft enough for him to sink into them.

Present Mic grabbed the remote off of a throw pillow, muttering about how many times it had been lost to the couch already, and “Why can’t they just put it on the ottoman or something?” before turning back to him with his signature grin in place. “We’re learning about how to handle the press and fans. Diplomacy!”

“Pardon?”

“I’ll go through a table of contents with you, hold on.”

Agreeing to take Present Mic on for his internship at Izuku’s suggestion could be construed as a “fuck you” to Endeavor, (it *definitely* could be) but while Izuku’s faith in the man gave him hope, he honestly had no idea what to expect from the Voice hero.

His teaching methods during their time at UA, while loud, were effective. The man's careers practically depended on him being loud enough to incapacitate people, though, so Shouto could not begrudge his volume, nor the upbeat attitude that accompanied his persona.

Perhaps diplomacy would be his first lesson because Present Mic gained enough experience on the subject to know firsthand how important it was. Weeks ago, when he and Izuku trained together and he revealed his distaste for Shouto's father, one of the things he mentioned was his father's demeanor. His inability to comfort victims.

"Rule one, rule of thumb," Present Mic began, the television turning on with a quiet *click*. "When you talk with the press and your fans, watch your mouth. Whatever you say will be posted, streamed, commented on, etc. Some of the higher heroes may get away with a few remarks but all heroes in the Limelight are subject to the judgment of everyone around them."

The screen switched to show images of articles. "Next, when you work with the police, treat them with the respect they deserve. Because of heroes, any work the police do is often overshadowed by some fight. Heroes also tend to be given credit if they work a joint case with the police, even if they were just a guard detail." He pointed at the headlines of the articles, then read aloud a few excerpts.

"They're only mentioned briefly," Shouto noted.

He nodded, the screen switching again. "This brings us to the last bullet point: working with other heroes." He showed pictures of duos and matches made in the field to better fight the villain. "Most of the time, you work with whoever's in the area. That means, while you may have to think on your feet for a while, you will probably find a rhythm with your co-workers. Credit is usually split when more than one hero is involved but none of us have a real say in what the press prints."

The pictures changed, showing more articles, the headlines praising only a singular hero. "When this happens, work relationships may become strained because in the Limelight, our popularity determines our pay. Credit is a necessity and all of us know it. The more well known we are, the more pay we are likely to receive."

"Is that why you work three jobs?"

Present Mic looked at him quizzically. "Kid, if I worked three jobs for

the money, I'd be crazy. I became a hero because I wanted to save people. I became a radio show host because I wanted to play music and interact with my fans. I am a teacher because I love being able to teach you guys. If any of those didn't make me happy, I would have dropped them."

Shouto thought about his father. He couldn't think of a single time that the man appeared happy, truly *happy,* with himself or anyone around him.

Would he be content to work as a hero?

He thought of Izuku during their match, a smile etched onto his features even as he shivered from the temperatures. He thought of his mother, who encouraged him to be the kind of hero he wanted to be. Shouto thought of his siblings and of himself, all of them young and afraid. They desperately needed a hero, a real one, to save them.

Yet, no one came.

Years ago, Shouto vowed to never use his fire, fearing that it could only harm. Izuku suppressed his own quirk because of how he feared others would view it. Yamazawa hid himself behind snark and sarcasm but Shouto saw it in him, too.

Shouto wanted to be a hero for them. For the kids who were afraid that no hero would ever save them. He ached to help those who had given up hope, those who feared, so that he could show them that there was light at the end of the tunnel.

He needed to show them because his world view changed, so drastically, so rapidly, when Izuku showed him how bright the world could be.

"Why do you keep punching?"

Mirio faltered, allowing Gran Torino to land a kick to his ribs. When he landed, he ceased attacking, letting Mirio cough.

"What?" He asked.

Izuku looked at Nighteye, who nodded, and stood away from an older,

solved case they had been practicing on. “It’s like you just got One for All all over again. You obviously know what to do with your first quirk but you aren’t acting like One for All is your own. It shows in how you’re fighting.”

Gran Torino glanced at him with pleasant surprise. “Go on,”

“All Might fights mainly with punches and, because he gave you a quirk, you’re trying to mess with your own fighting style. You have Full Cowl but you aren’t using your entire body to fight.”

Mirio looked at them quizzically. “This is All Might’s quirk, isn’t it? Shouldn’t I try to fight like him?”

“Fighting like him would have broken all your bones,” Nighteye said dryly. “You’ve already discovered and practiced your own way, changing that would only succeed in making you hesitate in a fight.”

“And it’s not All Might’s quirk,” Izuku said firmly, reminding himself of a certain dual quirk user in a different situation. “Not anymore, anyway. He gave it to you. It’s your quirk.”

“You’re just full of gratifying observations, aren’t you?” Gran Torino jumped onto the table to ruffle his hair. He turned to Nighteye. “How’s that case going?”

“He’s made a few mistakes but he knows how to handle a situation.” Izuku beamed at the praise. “His observational skills are as adept as his journals make them out to be.”

At the mention of his journals, Izuku’s face turned an astounding shade of red. “Oh, jeez, I forgot about those.” He whined, covering his face with his hands.

“What journals?” Gran Torino questioned, glancing between Nighteye’s slight smile and Mirio’s proud grin.

“Midoriya, my *amazing* kohai-” Izuku keened quietly in mortification when Mirio clapped his hand over his shoulder. “-has written several journals about a multitude of heroes. They’ve been passed around in the hero community.”

“Oh!” Mirio lit up brighter, if that was possible. “And he does analysis for students at UA if they ask him to.”

At that, Izuku peeked out of his hands. “I do?”

“You didn’t know me for two minutes before you agreed to help me out,” he recalled. “I told my friends about it, too, so you might be asked to help some other students when the week is over.”

The chance of learning about new quirks made his face return to a slightly normal color. “Really? They want me to analyze their quirks?” He exulted, elation overcoming his embarrassment.

Mirio paused, taking in the raw expression of hope Izuku displayed. He smiled. “Yeah!”

Gran Torino bonked him on the head, jerking him from the mutterfest he had almost dissolved into. “Alright, alright. Both you can talk later. Mirio!”

Izuku sat back down as the two of them launched at each other again. His analysis of the other students outside of his own class was limited because he never got the chance to see them in action. The Sports Festival would have allowed him a chance to see them but with the changes to his suit and Mirio’s appearance, he hadn’t had the time to watch the other two years’ performances. It made him melancholy, to realize that because his life had been turned around so much that his main past coping mechanism needed to be put aside for other things.

But this. *This.* UA students coming to him for analysis and listening- not thinking he was creepy or stalking them- because he wanted to help them and they were asking for his thoughts. When was the last time before Mirio that he sat down and scrutinized something new?

“You enjoy analysis that much?”

Jolting, Izuku’s head whipped up to face Nighteye. “Was I mumbling?”

A semblance of a smile crossed Nighteye’s face as he passed the case papers back in front of Izuku. “Yes.”

“Sorry.” Pink rose to his ears. He leaned closer to the table to see the reports. “And, yeah, it’s been a hobby of mine since I could write.”

“Keep that enthusiasm,” Nighteye told him. “Now, if you’ll look here, tell me what this officer did wrong on his report.”

Tomura leaned against the wall, his shoulder throbbing painfully. “Sensei,” he growled. “Let me have more Nomu. Let me show that Hero Killer prick that he was wrong to turn us down.”

His words were as sharp as his blades, used expertly, and they cut into him as agonizingly as the wound in his shoulder.

“You have no conviction.”

He put his fingers to a glass, watching it fall apart, as his fury muddled his mind. “I’ll show him the League of Villains has plenty of *conviction.”*

Chapter End Notes

I just got past some writer's block and I'm Great.

I know I sort of pulled a 180 with nighteye but Izuku needs ALL the family and I didn't wanna do nighteye like that

Thank you for the comments, I really appreciate them!

discord, so you know when I update

In for a penny...

Chapter Notes

It's almost been a month but here it is!

Thank you for 50k hits

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ochako breathed in and out, counting the thumps of Mirko's feet as she delivered bone-breaking kicks to the villains.

It was their third day of interning with her, their second day doing patrols where Mirko beat up villains and the two of them sat, licenseless, watching a pro hero work. She made up for their inability to participate by running them ragged as they moved through her patrol route. Ochako had thrown up once already and was currently trying not to embarrass herself further. Bakugo massaged his shoulder with one hand and his wrist with another, the strain of his own quirk inducing his own kind of pain. The two of them politely ignored the other in favor of dealing with their own quirk lashback.

Mirko allowed herself to be stopped by civilians who called out her name, backtracking, and the students watched her sharper edges dull for the fawning fans. The change of her feral smile to a soft smirk jarred Ochako. She glanced at Bakugo, wondering if he would ever become like this. He looked up, somehow sensing her thoughts, and sneered as if he knew what she was thinking.

Then, they were flying across rooftops again, Bakugo and Ochako flinging themselves after Mirko with their quirks. She felt bile rise in her throat and gulped it down, remembering the sparring match that ended with Bakugo yelling profanities from where he floated near the ceiling. She could do this. Her muscles burned from the exertion but Ochako refused to fall behind the two of them.

By the time they stopped, the sun had sunken into the horizon and her limbs turned to jelly upon the realization that the exercise was finally being stopped. She cursed softly as she stumbled into the showers, washing herself at a sluggish pace, and pulling on her clothes like her limbs were heavy with weights. She vaguely realized Bakugo was pulling her to the common area, speaking to her in gruff tones about stretching. Simply nodding along, she copied his movements at a

painstaking, plodding rate.

In the morning, she woke up in her bed, not remembering ever peeling her body off the floor, and nodded to Bakugo in thanks when she saw him in the kitchen. He huffed and turned away from her.

The two of them had fallen into a routine of sorts, neither of them speaking much during their interactions, but they formed a comradery with each other. A type of respect for each other that acknowledged that they were both formidable opponents. Mirko put them through hell and there was no time for bickering when the two of them were too busy attempting to catch their breaths any time Mirko gave them an opportunity.

“Arm doin’ okay?” She asked, biting into her food.

“How’re your shitty muscles?” he said in return, turning on a blender.

Alright, so both of them were a little worse for wear. When the blender stopped, silence shrouded the room but by now it didn’t bother either of them.

The door slammed open and Ochako choked on her food. She coughed, dislodging the piece of bread in her throat, and watched Mirko slap her hands onto the table.

“We’re going on a night patrol!” she smirked.

Ochako shared a glance with Bakugo, communicating the challenge that they set for themselves.

Mirko, being her own brand of crazy, made them do trust exercises all day.

Ochako’s body buzzed with anticipation, the world dark around her. She strained her ears for movement, for any sound, unable to utilize her vision because of the blindfold over her eyes. Bakugo shouted and she lurched forward, her fist landing against something solid. Ochako grinned at the sound of Bakugo’s triumphant cackle when her opponent thudded on the floor.

“I thought you were supposed to be all about solo work,” Ochako said as the three of them finished cleaning up.

“Yeah, what the fuck?” Bakugo agreed bluntly.

Mirko chuckled, flashing them her blazing grin. “I picked you two for separate reasons, y’know.” They nodded, waiting for a proper answer. “Both of you remind me of me, though. I was a lot like you growing up, Bakugo, because I didn’t wanna be seen like some dainty rabbit. I almost screwed up my ability to create any working professional relationships because I couldn’t work with other people.

“Uraraka, you got fire in you, but you’re hesitant to trust yourself. Hesitation kills more people than I care to count. Trust in your own abilities and in others’ is crucial, even if you plan on being a solo type of hero.” She paused, looking between the two of them. “If you two work on those things, I think you’ll be golden. Trust and cooperation, because you both have determination in spades.”

Mirko ordered them to take a nap a few hours before their patrol began and the two of them dutifully listened. Before Ochako knew it, though, the three of them were in their uniforms and they were heading out on a new route, the sounds of the city less abundant during the night as they patrolled.

Mirko’s ears twitched and she stiffened, twisting just in time to witness something streak across the sky.

The roar that rattled from its chest echoed over the city.

Shouto watched Mic interact with his fans as they walked through his patrol route, his teacher’s hero persona in full effect as he talked boisterously. Loudly. A few giggling teenagers, girls, Mic reminded him slyly, asked *him* for an autograph and a photo. It confused him but he complied, signing his hero name on the photo of them all.

It was the second day of his internship and Mic’s idea of training to be a hero remained vastly different from Endeavor’s. There was no physical training in sight, actually. Mic hadn’t mentioned it and Shouto wasn’t going to be the one to bring it up.

The patrol ended and Shouto stepped towards the locker room but Mic blocked his path. “Actually, we’re going to practice with that quirk of yours, alright? Follow me.”

Dread snuffed out the comfortable atmosphere he allowed himself to bask in around his teacher these past few hours. Mic carried the proverbial weight of the conversation he started as they arrived in a

training room.

"'Kay, kid, you said that you wanted to work on control, right? Light up your hand, I want to see what we're working with."

Cautiously, Shouto held up his arm, and, keeping a wary eye on his teacher, he lit a small flame in the palm of his hand. It sent spiders crawling up his skin, goosebumps rising in their wake. He repeated Izuku's proclamation to himself in an attempt to garner some confidence, chanting *it's mine, not his* in his mind.

"How about some ice, too?" Mic said gently, breaking through the gathering fog of thoughts. "I know you have more control over that, so show me a snowflake or something."

Shouto raised his other hand, drawing together a palm-sized ice sculpture of a snowflake. His mother used to make sculptures of the family, beautifully detailed, and though the snowflake paled in comparison to her work, the reminder of her quelled the rising heat that the fire called from his core.

"It's beautiful," Mic assured him, taking the snowflake from his hand. He let his hand drop back to his side, listening to Mic talk. "I know your dad is all brute force and has an 'if I can throw a fireball at it, it isn't my problem' type of attitude but I would like to see if you can make something a little more. Do you want to try out anything?"

It was weird, how Mic's words left room for argument. Shouto could decline if he wanted to and he had a feeling Mic would allow him to simply wash up if he said no.

"Tell me," Shouto said quietly.

Mic flashed him a thousand-watt smile. Shouto thought all his smiles were very genuine for a man who smiled all day long. "Can you make it spin? Like a tornado, but tiny?"

Shouto concentrated on the ploom of fire and, slowly, it began to take shape, thinning as it spun. His chest tightened as he watched in bewildered fascination as the fire lengthened out into a longer, faster spire.

"If it helps, keep making ice,"

He listened, frost immediately falling from his right hand and coating the floor.

“Can you use it like a whip, you think?”

They tested from there, finding out that he could potentially use a whip of fire, but for now, the most he could produce was the whip part. Any and all attempts to control the whip ended with the wall scorched and Mic’s banana hair being nearly cut off.

“May I try something?” Shouto asked, surprising himself with the request. It was a testament to how comfortable he felt, that he thoughtlessly said such a thing. His father would never have allowed him to experiment and possibly procure a superior idea to whatever he had in mind.

“Go ahead, listener.”

Something unfurled in his chest, the tension in his shoulders lessening as he collected heat in his fingertips. Shouto carefully twirled the fire from each individual finger into a small ball in the center of his hand. It churned with building heat, the perpetual fuel of flame making it remain in constant motion. Mic observed him silently, watching the sphere become brighter and brighter until it appeared to be its own sun. Heat rolled off of it in waves, filling the room, and Shouto’s hand began burning.

“Where can I throw it?” He practically shouted in his urgency.

Mic sputtered for a second, then pointed at the wall on the far end of the room. “That one’s supposedly fire-proof!”

He chucked it at the wall and-

Fuck, the mini-sun *went through it.* Like a hot knife through butter.

Both of them stared at the hole in shock for a moment, disbelief gluing them to the ground.

Jerking from his stupor, Shouto lurched after it, hoping that his experiment would not kill some poor person walking by. “What room is on the other side?” he asked hastily.

“Nothing!” Mic hollered back, sounding slightly panicked. “It faces an empty building-”

The sound of shattering glass cut him off and they both shared a glance before bolting out of the room.

“Present Mic! Sir, something exploded in the-”

“I’m on it!” He interrupted the worker, sprinting past his harried employees with Shouto hot on his trail. “Don’t worry about it!”

A few hours later, Mic was patting him on the back as he handed a grouchy real estate agent a stack of signed papers.

“Well, kid, you blew up the top two floors of a building and seared a hole in my wall.” He put his head in his hands and Mic had the audacity to laugh. “Don’t look so down! All you really did was scorch the place and blow out some window panes. I’m proud of you for coming up with that, though I guess I should’ve known to stop you sooner.”

“No, it’s my fault. I must apologize again-”

“Kid, this is gonna be a *great* special move.” He smirked. “Oh, I can picture Aizawa’s face now.”

“I destroyed a *building-”*

“It was only the top floors.” He batted his hand in the air as if the motions could ward off their problems. “It’s a building that UA will send Cementoss to fix and pay the people who own it. You’re here on an internship, so the only thing I’m being held accountable for is keeping you from taking out another building.”

His third day was far less adrenaline-inducing, but then they were back in the training room and he carefully avoided looking at the flex tape that covered the hole in the wall.

“Any other ideas?” Mic prodded, dutifully ignoring the how as well. “We should probably refrain from concentrating too much heat like last time, but anything else is fair game.”

Shouto blinked at Mic in incredulity. Authentic as he sounded, he must have been a madman to allow Shouto to continue experimenting with his quirk.

“You’re serious.”

“Yup! Fire away!” He paused, then chuckled to himself. “Literally, I

guess."

"You're not afraid I'll burn another hole through your wall?"

Mic grinned at him. "I'm in here with a ridiculous amount of flammable hair product and telling you to create fire in a close proximity to you, I'm *fearless."*

"Your hair *is* half of your hero persona," Shouto agreed.

He barked out a laugh. "Yes, so let's be cautious about projectiles."

A rather dangerous idea seemed to spark in their minds simultaneously.

"Hey," Mic began, his smile turning cheshire. "You could-"

"This will end in disaster."

The comment, not an outright refusal, made his eyes light up. "Do it, kid." He egged on. "I think we're both curious."

Shouto sighed defeatedly and pushed a small burst of fire into his hand.

The fourth day consisted of a patrol shift that had Shouto dragging his feet by the end of it. The sun had long since disappeared and his feet hurt. Mic warned him before they left that their patrol would drag on since he wanted Shouto to experience a longer shift but he hadn't expected to be this grouchy by the end of it. Small-time criminals apprehended, civilians' items signed, patrol officially over, Shouto sighed in relief.

The day began with a short lesson of first-aid on a bloody intern who volunteered to be the victim he had to tend to. The intern was overdramatic on many levels, screaming when he pressed his hands over one of his 'wounds', swooning, wailing, and shouting curses angrily as he walked through the steps to tend to each injury with an *incredibly* serious Mic. It was only after the lesson was, the intern dead yet still groaning loudly, that Mic burst into giggles.

"Okay," Mic said, stifling a yawn. "Time to head back to the agency and-" His eyes snagged on something in the sky, his gaze narrowing

behind his glasses. Before Shouto could turn to find the source of his distraction, Mic's eyes widened. The next thing Shouto knew, he was face down on the pavement, Mic's body above him.

"Up," He said frantically, pulling Shouto off the floor by the back of his costume. "That was a Nomu. I don't know what it's doing here but we need to make sure it-"

A scream erupted from a distance, others following it in rapid succession.

Mic cursed, stepping towards the sound when something else rumbled the ground beneath them. Shouto flinched at the sound of an explosion coming from the direction the Nomu flew in.

In the distance, roars erupted from within Hosu.

"What're you fiddling with?"

Izuku jumped in his seat at Gran Torino's voice. He heard Mirio stifle a laugh and glanced back down at the tiny gadget he put together with Gran Torino's old microwave parts. "It's just a beeper, really," he explained, gesturing to it's counterpiece. "Nothing advanced, but if you click one, the other will-"

A loud beep startled him and he turned to give Mirio an exasperated raise of his eyebrow. He chuckled and put the beeper back down, waving sheepishly at the other passengers who looked at them oddly.

"Why make them?" Gran Torino asked.

"I was bored." He shrugged. "Plus, what were you even going to do with your broken microwave? Throw it away?"

This time, Izuku was the one on the receiving end of exasperation, a raised eyebrow pointedly arched at him.

"Woah, did you see that?" someone further down the seats shouted.

"Oh crap, a building exploded!"

"Passengers, please hold onto your seats-"

Their train jolted, throwing them into the side of the train car. Izuku

huffed under Mirio's crushing brawn, tapping repeatedly on his senpai's body until he hurriedly removed himself, allowing Izuku to properly breathe. He was about to say something, but his breath was stolen by the sight before him.

His Sight flickered on without his permission and his vision tunneled.

Two aurae's squirmed around the blue-gray body that held itself over a hero. They rose and fell around it, fluctuating exactly like the three colors had at the USJ. Its eyes bulged through a metal mask, the brain not on display. Because Izuku killed one, exposing a weakness. Fuck, they needed to get rid of it. They had to get it away from the people-

Everything fell back into focus when the Nomu was kicked out of the train car, the hole in the metal ripping further when Gran Torino sent the two of them careening through a nearby wall. Passengers screamed and Izuku shut off his Sight, careful not to clamp down on the rest of his quirk.

"Surge, you-"

"I'm not staying here if that's what you're about to say, Lemillion."

He turned, squinting at Izuku with a look that could almost be classified as a glare. "Give me one of the beepers." He commanded. Izuku tossed him one. "If we get separated and you're in danger, use it. This is not permission to go off by yourself on purpose. Stay close."

Hosu city was burning, that much, they could see as they jumped from the train. Izuku pulled his mouthguard up to protect him from smoke inhalation and kept to Mirio's side.

An intersection held multiple Nomu, multiple heroes. He turned in time to watch one of the beasts drop a semi-truck onto a car. The explosion sent him flying and he smacked into a potted plant outside of one of the stores.

"Tenya!" Izuku's head snapped toward the sound of his friend's name. "Tenya, where are you?"

He ran off? His eyes slid to the destruction caused before the fire, to the chaos that kept amping up with each roar the Nomu gave. That didn't sound like Iida at all. Why would he leave without telling his supervisor when the city-

Hosu city. The city that the Hero Killer attacked.

The Hero Killer, who had an unfulfilled quota. The Hero Killer who maimed Iida's brother.

"Lemillion!" Izuku cried out. He had to find Iida quickly before he found the Hero Killer.

A Nomu landed directly in front of him, its wings fanning out around him. It stared at him, the eyes oddly focused on him. A rumble rose from its throat, the mouth opening to shriek and ear-splitting wail. Other cries answered the call, both close and far away.

Mirio appeared, coming through the Nomu's wings. "Surge-"

"My friend might be after Stain," he said in a rush, unholstering his gun and firing off an explosive round that sent the Nomu back a few steps. "I don't know if I'm right, but he's alone right now and if-."

Mirio's head whipped to the side. He shouted something incomprehensible and shoved Izuku back. Talons swept through his body harmlessly and Izuku rose to his feet.

"Go!" he hollered, defending against the Nomu. "Find your friend, I'll catch up!"

His shoes pulsed with power and propelled him away from the chaos.

Where would the Hero Killer be? The news said his victims were found in secluded areas. If the Nomu were here to distract the heroes from actively searching for Stain then that meant the League of Villains and the Hero Killer were connected. That meant Shigaraki might be close by. The thought of him working together with Stain sent shivers down his spine but he concentrated on scanning the alleys for people.

He used his Sight, catching a glimpse of something silver-

Silver meant Iida. Iida, who wore armor like some white knight and talked him down from a panic attack. Iida, who was going through the trauma of seeing his brother's career stripped from him because a serial killer decided he didn't fit his ideals.

Iida, who was bleeding out on the ground as the Hero Killer stood over another hero's prone body.

Aizawa's aura was red but the color emitted a plush shade almost rosy enough to match his pink sweatpants.

Stain's aura reflected a scarlet so deep Izuku couldn't help but stare. Crimson like the liquid around Iida. Intimidating like the man himself but Izuku ignored the primal instinct in him screaming that he should run and tackled the Hero Killer. He recovered quickly, scrambling to Iida's side.

His side, his mind screeched and his body followed without hesitation. Iida inhaled and suddenly so could Izuku. He pressed his hands over the wound because he had to stop the bleeding. The slash in his side gushed blood and the silver around them was Izuku's only tether to reality as he scrambled to cover the long injury. Everything was so red. So, so *red,* and his first-aid kit could only help so much, even though the cut was shallow.

"Another child?"

The murderer. The Hero Killer was still present. Izuku couldn't fight, not when Iida's wound needed pressure. He needed to stall until Mirio could find him. Until anyone other than a Nomu could find them.

"Midoriya," Iida said, his voice dripping with anxiety and raspy from pain. "Midoriya, you need to leave."

Izuku clicked the beeper and met the eyes of the killer who towered over them. "I thought you killed heroes." He curled his body over Iida's protectively, tension overcoming his muscles as he knelt over his friend's body.

He had the gall to chuckle. "I kill fakes. Neither of these scum are worthy of the title 'hero'."

"And what fits your criteria, exactly?" Izuku said. "What makes them so horrible that you need to kill them?"

"Curious one, aren't you?" He held his breath, waiting for Stain to strike. The blow never came. "You're that boy from UA. The first year." Not waiting for Izuku to respond, he stalked closer. "And you're here, trying to save this false hero, even while you leave yourself defenseless."

"He's not a hero yet," Izuku grit out. "He's barely a teenager-"

"And you're not?" He steamrolled over Izuku's words. "He came to kill

me for revenge. For his *brother.* People don't change and he certainly won't. If I must rid the world of him to prevent another false hero from rising, then I have no qualms killing a child."

"You haven't answered my question," he reminded him quietly, nausea rolling his stomach.

"What makes a true hero?" His abnormally wide mouth contorted into a manic baring of his teeth. "A true hero is absolutely selfless. They aren't a hero for the fame or the money. They aren't some *legacy,"* he spat, glaring at Iida from where he stood. "They are like All Might."

Oh, that's bullshit.

The tip of a blade poked his nose. "What was that?"

"I said that out loud," he said out loud. He hummed weakly, pursing his lips. "Well, in for a penny,"

Did he actually plan to insult the Hero Killer's ideals? Yes, because where was his self-preservation? Gone, that's where.

"All Might's your definition of a true hero?" The only reason All Might became All Might was because of a legacy but he couldn't exactly say that. "That's the standard you're holding everyone to?"

"Yes," he replied coolly, lowering the blade. "All Might saves people without hesitation."

Izuku meets his eyes and wonders, *is this what I could have become?* If a few events didn't take place, would he have remained the fanboy who worshipped All Might? Resentment once plagued him. Disbelief that 'heroes' were called heroes when they congregated in wealthy cities where the cameras faced them and the people could pay for their damages in taxes.

UA's hero exams were a perfect example of what being a hero meant in the modern-day. Heroics is a highschool course and an occupation. Who decides what the exams are like? UA. Who passes the exams? People with flashy, physical quirks. What kind of heroes do they become? The eye-catching kind. The type that reels in the dough. Who does that money go to before the hero receives their paycheck? The Hero Commission. The Hero Commission that aids UA with funding.

"I have a friend who wants to be a hero for the money." Iida flinched at the mention of Uraraka. "They don't have some fantasy of being a

hero for the nobility of it. They just want to help their family and they're doing so by saving people. Are they worth killing?"

"Their motive-"

"All Might runs himself into the ground being the hero he is!" Izuku said, outraged. He remembered the scar in his side, the gaunt form that the brawn cloaked for the sake of the public. "It's an occupation, and there are people who don't do it just to save people. Plenty of people become doctors for the money, are you going to start killing those people, too?"

"That's different."

"It is," Izuku agreed. "It is because being a doctor doesn't mean you can tear apart the city and have the citizens pay for the damages. It's not the same because heroes are in the public eye and a lot of them are glorified celebrities who spend more time selling their brand than saving people. But killing them isn't right. You have to know that."

"I am the necessary evil, child." Stain backed away, raising his sword towards the hero slumped against the wall. "I am the-"

Izuku fired his gun, the sound of the shot echoing in the alley. Stain turned his gaze to the sky, where a flare exploded vibrantly. Izuku fired off another round, this time at the Hero Killer, not even knowing what sort of ammunition would hit him.

"I don't think evil will ever be necessary." Glitter exploded over Stain's pant leg and Izuku looked at his gun in betrayal. "You aren't making anything better. You're making them martyrs!"

Stain sneered, easily wrestling the gun from his grip.

Utterly defenseless with Iida slowly bleeding out beneath him, all he had were words.

"I've looked into the statistics, Stain. Their ratings rose astronomically after you killed them. It didn't matter that they abused their power as heroes or broke laws or anything else." Iida's blood seeped through his gloves and stuck to his hands, his breathing too shallow for comfort. "The attention you brought to them wasn't what they deserved for their actions. None of them deserved to die, even if they might have deserved to be stripped of their licenses."

The Hero Killer stepped forward and Izuku braced for a blow, a blade

cutting across his skin.

“You are much different than I thought you would be, after my talk with Shigaraki.”

That was arguably worse, actually. Izuku flinched, meeting his narrowed eyes with his own, wide with confusion. “What?”

“That brat likes you,” he continued. “I thought his taste in people would be as abhorrent as his league’s values. But I suppose we can both see the value in your existence.”

Excuse me, what the fuck?

“Thanks?” he squeaked.

Fire burst through the alleyway. Stain leaped back and Izuku threw himself over Iida’s body. What happened? Were the Nomu’s here?

“Izuku,” drawled a flat tone. “I apologize for not responding quicker.”

His head rose, daring to hope.

“Shouto,” he breathed, relief flooding him.

“The pros aren’t going to be very long,” he told them, his left hand glowing brighter by the second. “Your flare caught a lot of attention.”

Ice spread underneath them, allowing them and the hero Stain attempted to kill to slide to his side. Shouto raised his arm and a burst of flame shot from the ball in his hand.

At the same time, knives flew through the air, embedding themselves into his arm and grazing his cheek. Stain moved faster than Izuku knew a person without a speed quirk could, grasping Shouto’s shirt collar. His tongue shot out of his mouth and Izuku watched the next seconds unfold with rapt interest.

Stain’s tongue was unnaturally long, just as his mouth was wider than the average person’s. The muscle reached for Shouto’s cheek- for the blood, specifically, before his left side erupted into flames, forcing Stain to retreat.

“Blood,” he blurted softly. Stain’s eyes flicked to him. “His quirk needs him to ingest your blood for it to work.”

“Smart,” Stain retorted. “But it won’t help you.”

He charged, knives flying, and Izuku could only shield Iida as Shouto defended them. He cried out when a blade lodged itself in his shoulder. The shock of pain sharpened his focus and he searched the ground, knowing it could not be far.

His gun lay abandoned by a spike of half-melted ice, the strip of rainbow stark in the dark alley. Izuku took his gloves off, eternally thankful that he had chosen to wear the gloves that only rose half-way up his forearm instead of the ones that covered the skin up to his biceps, and pressed them into Iida's wound. Gently, he brought Iida's arm over the cloth, meeting his friend's eyes.

"Don't die," he ordered, springing from his position at his side.

The sudden movement caught their attention but by then Izuku was already aiming. Glitter burst in Stain's face, showering him in pink dust, then Stick hit his wrist into the wall, crawling up his arm and onto the building before he managed to pull away. Stain met his narrowed gaze, the gun in his hands still raised, and bared his teeth in a grin.

Glitter hit his forehead dead-on at the same time Shouto's ice encased his body.

The adrenaline didn't dissipate with the end of their fight, not as Izuku rushed back to Iida's side. "Still alive?" he queried.

Iida's voice sounded far too strained when he drew in a breath. "Midoriya-"

"Shouto!" he called, bringing the boy to their sides. "How good is your first-aid?"

"The actor intern that volunteered dramatically died in my arms."

Not willing to give the sentence any thought in the present moment, he gave him supplies. "Good enough." Iida made a weak squawk of indignation. "Help me."

They worked together, talking to each other in low murmurs until someone new entered the alley. Shouto shot to his feet, hands frosting and heated for another fight.

"Woah, it's just me!" Mirio put his hands up. "I brought-"

"Pyrice?" A supercharged yell rattled their eardrums. Izuku blinked at

Yamada as he barged in after Mirio. “Iz- I mean, *Surge?”* He stared at Izuku incredulously after spotting him.

“Shouta’s going to kill me,” he muttered to himself. His eyes traveled behind them, where the Hero Killer was encased in ice. Squinting, he pursed his lips and sighed. “Later,” he decided. “An ambulance is on its way, along with more heroes. Lemillion, get them out of here.”

The EMT bandaged his shoulder dutifully and he ended up standing with Yamada while they chained up the Hero Killer’s unconscious body.

“Your other parents and your siblings are on their way.” He glanced over to where Gran Torino conversed with Mirio. “I don’t think Sir Nighteye’s going to be safe when they all arrive, kiddo. How has the internship gone? You haven’t called us since that first night.”

“Sorry,” he mumbled, leaning into his side. “They’ve been nice. Nighteye apologized for being rude and dragging me to Gran Torino’s.”

“I think I speak for all your parents when I say we will want to know a little about that secret. We need to know if it’s dangerous.”

Izuku tugged on his arm, stepping in Gran Torino’s direction. “I’ll introduce you guys, come on-”

“Duck!”

Izuku did not duck.

Claws curled around his abdomen dug through his costume painfully. Shouts of his name were carried off by the wind. His shoes powered on and they swerved but without his gun, Izuku had no viable way to break the Nomu’s hold on his torso. The grip around his chest tightened painfully, his ribs creaking dangerously as they flailed in the air. He

Wheezing in breath after breath, Izuku’s vision turned spotty and dark.

An undetermined amount of time passed with the wind shrieking in his ears until he hit a surface with enough force to jolt him into

consciousness. He choked on a gasp, heaving in air.

“-told you to be careful with him,” hissed an oddly familiar voice. “You almost suffocated him!”

“Be lenient, the Nomus are not suited for complex orders.”

“Complex?” Izuku stared at Shigaraki and Kurogiri from his place on the gravel of the rooftop, curled into himself, still attempting to catch his breath. “How was that complex at all?” Shigaraki growled.

Glowing yellow eyes met his before returning to Shigaraki. “It seems our guest is with us, Tomura.”

Their eyes met and Izuku felt like the air in his lungs had been knocked out of him again. Shigaraki’s stare was so unlike the one he had given Izuku at the USJ. The softness in his vermillion gaze reminded him too much of the little boy he shared that tiny room with.

“Hey, Izuku.”

Izuku responded without thinking. “Hey, Raki.”

Chapter End Notes

discord, so you know when I update

Thank you for all the kudos and comments, they mean a lot to me

The truth has consequences

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Izuku tensed under Shigaraki's steady gaze. Goosebumps rose on his skin and the urge to flee was overcome by the striking memory of the Nomu's claws squeezing his chest. He thought that he was familiar with death, but this kind, the slow drag of suffocation, it made him nauseous. It made him terrified.

"I won't let it hurt you again," Shigaraki promised. Izuku blinked and realized that he had been staring at the Nomu. "I'm sorry about… before."

Before. He could mean a multitude of things. Before, when we abandoned you. Before, when I used my quirk on you. Before, when my Nomu almost killed you.

"Why am I here?" His voice cracked, still ragged from wheezing and from the emotional rollercoaster that's been the night. The scar that Shigaraki gave him twinged but that could have been because of the stab wound Stain gave him. He stood, swaying from the lightheadedness, and eyed his old friend warily. Kurogiri had disappeared, he noted.

"We're friends," he stated plainly. "I wanted to talk."

"S-So, you kidnap me?" he quipped. "Gee, I wish you'd done this when I hadn't *just* been stabbed, maybe I would be in the mood to chat like we're still little kids."

Shigaraki's eyes flickered to the white bandages over his hero costume with narrowed eyes. "You were stabbed? What happened?"

"Oh, what could have *possibly* happened to injure me when your Nomu's were ravaging the city?" He glared, fighting to see the man who almost murdered Aizawa, the man he was growing to see as a father, and not the boy who he befriended. "Your buddy Stain is a real pain in the ass, with his delusions of being a hero by killing heroes."

"Buddy?" he ground out.

Izuku blinked. "You're not working together?"

“No,” he spat. “I would never work with All Might loving scum like him.”

He raised an eyebrow, inching towards the edge of the roof. “Sounds like a touchy subject. Did he insult your choice in accessories?” Izuku pointedly gave him and the hands curled around him a once-over. “Because, if he did, I can’t blame him.”

Huffing, he watched Shigaraki roll his eyes and take off the appendages. “Izuku-”

“Shigaraki,” he began sternly, seeming to catch him off guard. “How can you actually still call us friends? After everything?”

“Because we *are,”* he insisted. “Of course we’re still friends.”

Too much of his resolve melted at the statement. “Ra- S-Shigaraki-”

Elation flashed across his features at the almost-use of his nickname. Shigaraki stepped closer. “See, Izuku? We can be friends again. You just have to come with me.”

His outstretched hand caught Izuku unawares, too busy searching his face for something he could hate, for anything to dispel himself.

Shigaraki’s hand clasped his own in a four-fingered grip and both of them tensed, realizing the slip-up.

Nothing happened.

Shigaraki didn’t freeze and his eyes didn’t go blank.

Izuku ripped his hand out of his grip, his breathing turning rapid and panicked as he stumbled back. “W-What the fuck,” he whispered in profound confusion. *“What the fuck?”*

“Izuku-” Shigaraki called out, reaching again.

This time Izuku reached back, grabbing his hand with his bare ones and not making an effort to suppress his quirk.

Again, nothing happened.

His legs gave out beneath him and Shigaraki followed him to the ground.

“Izuku?” he tried again, bringing his other hand to hold Izuku’s as he

cried.

“You’re not-” he gasped, blinking away the tears in his eyes. “You’re *okay,* how are you okay?” Shigaraki stayed quiet, allowing Izuku to press his trembling hands into his own.

The doctor said that the sensory parts of his quirk had settled, that they had an on/off switch now because they could mature. Had this part of his quirk settled too?

Does that mean if he hadn’t locked up his quirk this could have happened years ago?

Does that mean if his mother had been a bit more patient-

He shoved that thought away, focussing on the way the skin of Shigaraki’s hands burned against his own. Everything narrowed down to their hands, to the first real human contact without consequences that he had experienced in nearly ten years.

“Raki,” he said, his voice cracking and chock-full of emotion. “This-fuck, this better not be a dream.”

“It’s not,” he hurried to respond. “I promise this is real.”

Izuku wasn’t sure he could let go at this point. If the heroes showed up he would probably have to pry himself away. “I don’t want to let go,” he whispered in anguish.

“Then *don’t,”* Shigaraki said, gripping Izuku tighter. “Stay with me.”

“I-I can’t-” *I can’t leave them.*

“You *can,”* he urged. “It can be just us again. No one else matters, Izuku.”

But they do. He remembered Mitsu welcoming him into her family and Aizawa doing the same thing. He remembered watching Mei cackling as he shot off into the air for the first time with his shoes and Hitoshi calming him down from panic attacks. He remembered Ayumi teaching him how to fight and how Yamada made everything around him less intimidating when he was frightened.

“My family matters,” Izuku said firmly, yet kept his hold on Shigaraki. “I won’t leave them.”

“Then let go,” Shigaraki dared.

But he couldn't. Seconds passed and Izuku couldn't loosen his grip. The years he had been deprived of physical contact were all catching up to him and crashing into him, pressing his hands into Shigaraki's skin. His face crumpled, Izuku's sobs coming out in choked gasps.

"It's okay," he soothed, bringing his hand to touch Izuku's face. "You don't have to let go."

The moment his hand touched his cheek Izuku was gone. Fire erupted under his light touch and Izuku pressed his face into it, not fully caring that Tomura could hurt him so easily like this. He whimpered, feeling pathetic and far too vulnerable.

"You hurt me," he argued feebly in an attempt to convince himself to let go.

The guilt that brought down Tomura's features was all too genuine. "I know," he replied remorsefully. His hand drifted to the scar on his neck, fingers ghosting over the skin, and Izuku shuddered, closing his eyes. "I'm sorry, Izuku. I won't ever do that again. Please, come with me."

He pressed his face harder against Tomura's palm, opening his shining eyes. "Raki, I-"

"Surge!"

Tomura was wrenched away from him, Gran Torino's figure registering in his mind. Suddenly everything was too cold, the space in front of him too empty, and he felt immobilized by the abrupt change.

"Izuku," said a new voice. Hands pulled him to his feet. "Are you hurt?"

Instead of answering, Izuku grabbed Yamada's hands, watching in awe as nothing happened. His touch was akin to a blaze in the midst of a blizzard and he clung to the feeling just as much as he clung to the man in front of him.

"Don't do that," he admonished, ripping himself from Izuku's hold. "Don't hurt yourself!"

"I'm n-not," Izuku blubbered, reaching out. "I-I'm not. I- *please-"*

Something hit his injured shoulder digging into his wound and he

didn't have the strength to stay conscious.

Shouta is going to kill me, Hizashi thought for the millionth time that night as a chunk of the wall hit Izuku as Gran Torino kicked off of the half disintegrated floor of the roof after the disappearing figure of Shigaraki through a warp gate. He caught Izuku, carefully avoiding his exposed skin.

The kinds of memories brought up by this second reunion were likely not the best kind, judging by how frazzled and out of it Izuku had been.

The Hero Killer's temporary escape in the commotion of Izuku's kidnapping and the final message he squeezed in had glued them all to the street for a solid minute before everyone burst into action, the heroes split between recapturing a frostbitten serial killer and recovering Izuku.

"The only ones allowed to kill me are All Might," Stain raised his maskless face and the pure killing intent rolling off of him paralyzed them. "And ***Surge."***

The obscene amount of glitter on his thigh and face didn't do much to lessen the fear factor in the heat of the moment and as much as he wanted to know how Izuku had gained the respect of a notorious serial killer, he settled for carrying him out of danger and reluctantly handed him off to the paramedics.

"Shouto," Endeavor said, stepping towards Hizashi's student. Todoroki stiffened, his face hardening.

"Pyrice!" Hizashi shouted, cutting off whatever Endeavor had been about to say. "Let's go!"

The Number Two hero bristled. "Excuse me, I am-"

"Yes, sir." Todoroki brushed past his father, swiftly joining him on the other end of the street.

"Right," Hizashi began, heading for one of the ambulances that hadn't left. "We're going to the hospital, too, actually."

The ambulance they rode in had Izuku on the stretcher, face down,

revealing the excess damage made by the debris.

"Sorry we got separated."Hizashi nudged their shoulders together. "How you doin', kid?"

"It's not your fault," Todoroki said firmly. "You had a job to do."

Those words pulled on too many of his heartstrings and rang too many warning bells. "Yeah, listener, I'm a hero. But, look at me," He met his student's eyes. "I am your teacher. And on this internship, my top priority should have been keeping you safe. Understand?"

At his nod, Hizashi leaned back into the wall of the ambulance. "I just hope that the police are lenient with you guys."

"With *us?"* he asked incredulously.

"Quirk usage in public without a license," he grumbled. "The laws surrounding illegal quirk use can get pretty dicey in situations like this but you could be barred from the Hero course if the police decide to charge you."

"Us?" he said again, furious. "Izuku and Iida nearly *died.* Without Iida there, Native would have been murdered and if Izuku hadn't found them, Iida would have bled out. Are you saying we should have just stood by?"

"No, but I can't condone any of your actions, either." He sighed, rubbing his face. "The way it looks, all three of you broke the law and used possibly lethal force to take down a villain without the authority to do so."

Todoroki clenched his jaw. "Isn't it a hero's job to help people?"

"It is, but none of you are heroes yet," Hizashi took off his Present Mic glasses, looking at the soot smeared on the surface. "All of your supervisors, myself included, could face serious repercussions."

His anger deflated. "Oh," he murmured. "I-I don't regret what I did."

"In my opinion, you shouldn't," Hizashi confessed. "But it's up to the police of Hosu to decide how harshly all of you will be punished once the reports are filled out."

"I don't think Izuku even used his quirk during the fight," Todoroki mumbled into the silence. "He only used his support items."

“So, he *was* the source of the glitter.”

Todoroki snorted. “I suppose so.”

If Shouta had to put up with another moment of Mei and Hitoshi making jabs at each other, he would leave them on the side of the road. He will make them wish that all trains to Hosu hadn’t been delayed because chucking them out of the car honestly felt like a viable option at this point. Izuku and Hizashi’s radio silence, with only the fact that both of them were somehow involved in the Hero Killer’s capture, had put them all on edge and the kids seemed to be coping by insulting each other passive-aggressively.

“Is that the hospital?” Mitsu pointed out the tall building. Ambulances were still shuttling people in and the parking lot was the nightmare kind of crowded that Shouta would not have the patient to deal with.

The video of Stain proclaiming his ideology had gone viral in mere hours and Izuku’s hero name had been subjected to scrutinization, the question of who Stain put on the same level as All Might high on many people’s priority list. Mei and Hitoshi took one look at the serial killer’s glittered clothing at the beginning of the video and had alerted their parents because who else besides the problem child would leave Stain covered in glitter?

Getting into Hosu had been a horrific endeavor filled with road rage and tense silence but getting near that hospital would kill him, surely. This was why he didn’t drive. Why hadn’t he convinced Mitsu or Ayumi to do it?

Finally, *finally* inside the hospital, the five of them were able to find out where Izuku was staying. Apparently, Hizashi hadn’t been injured enough to warrant a stay, which Shouta considered a dodged bullet.

Hizashi ended up finding them, saying he was on his way back from getting a coffee, and brought them back to the room. “I don’t know how much I’m allowed to tell you,” Hizashi said slowly. “So, I’m just going to tell you everything I know before they forbid it.” He finished quickly.

They all agreed to the decision without argument and allowed him to reiterate his knowledge of the story that took place during the previous night.

So. Nomus attacked Hosu. Hizashi and Todoroki got separated and when Izuku's flare went up, Todoroki responded. Said flare was sent up because Iida was bleeding out and Izuku was alone with the Hero Killer. They fought, won, and Stain was apprehended. Izuku was kidnapped by a Nomu and Stain took advantage of the chaos to spit out a last ditch "I'm better than you, but not better than All Might and Surge". Stain was captured again and Shigaraki's talk with Izuku really messed with him.

Fun.

His kid's hero name was being plastered everywhere on the internet because of a serial killer and his trauma had been brought up because he had to face one of the sources of all the bullshit in his life.

Hizashi said that the kid touched him, bare-handed.

Izuku was constantly terrified of taking off his gloves around them because he didn't want them to be caught up in his quirk. For him to instigate physical contact without hesitating was completely out of character. Shouta knew Izuku took his orders not to suppress his quirk to heart so it was a shock to hear Hizashi tell him the kid reached for him. The range of his temper seemed to grow, though, as he thought about what Shigaraki possibly could have done to make Izuku hurt himself like that and undo the healing they had done over the past few weeks.

Iida was wheeled in and, once again, Shouta wondered what the hell had happened.

He rose from the floor and walked out of the room to get a coffee and hoped the beverage was as okay as Hizashi claimed it to be.

The vending machine spit out the can when another person appeared.

"Hello," he said to Sir Nighteye.

"Yes, hello," he replied curtly. "Would you step aside, please? I need to use the vending machine."

This is the asshole that's been teaching Izuku? Perhaps his observations were slightly skewed by his pulled together image of the man he had gleaned from a few honorable mentions when working with the police and what Izuku said about him, but the man was living up to the hype. Izuku should have been cities away from all the chaos that went down last night, safe in Sir Nighteye's agency, but because he dragged

him out to Gran fucking Torino's, he was in a hospital bed.

"Your staring is obvious and unwanted," Nighteye groused, picking out his beverage.

Shouta glared fiercely before exiting the room and returning to Izuku's room.

"The coffee that bad, Shouta?" Mitsu inquired as he slumped against the wall of the room.

"I met Sir Nighteye," he revealed. All of them straightened, interested to hear about the man who indirectly made Izuku cut off communication with them. "He's an ass."

Izuku blinked awake, his mind muddled with distinct, contradicting feelings of sorrow and elation. His shoulder throbbed as memories bled into sharp focus.

Phantom warmth danced across his skin and tears rose to his eyes. He couldn't tell what sort they were, not when Tomura's longing expression consumed his thoughts and memories of his gentle touch as he cradled his cheek. He recalled Yamada's torn expression as he pulled out of Izuku's grasp. Pulled away like he didn't want to touch Izuku.

Stop it, he ordered himself. Yamada only wanted to keep them both safe.

"Izuku?"

"Hm?" he replied distantly.

A shadow fell over him, blocking out the light, and he turned to see who it was. "Hey there, kid," Mitsu said, smiling softly. "Feeling alright?"

The need to touch somebody crashed into him like a tidal wave, a command demanding to be followed.

Mitsu's hands were calloused and large, unlike Tomura's and Yamada's.

And just like their touches, this one was fleeting.

She jerked away from him and the rest of the world came into focus as unbidden hurt washed over him. His family sat around him in various degrees of distress. He sat up, ignoring their words telling him to stay laying down. His ribs ached as he moved but he was used to pain.

“Please,” he rasped, his throat dry. “Please let me-”

“Stop suppressing your quirk,” Aizawa said gently. “I don’t know what Shigaraki said, but-”

“‘M not,” he interrupted. “I promise I’m *not,* so please just-”

Mitsu hesitantly reached her hand out towards him, her eyes a blazing bronze, and he latched onto her, pressing their skin together and relishing in her warmth.

“He’s not lying,” she whispered in awe and disbelief. Her copper-colored eyes shined with tears. “He’s not lying.”

“Stop moping around, Mirai.” Gran smacked the back of his head. A feat, considering the height difference. “It’s not your fault the kid had to fight a psychopath.”

“But it is.” His head weighed heavily in his hands, the coffee he had bought growing condensated atop its coaster. “Too much of this is my fault, Gran.”

“The quirk bit is your fault, yes,” he agreed bluntly. “But tonight was not. Stain’s actions are his own and so are the League’s.”

“Yeah, chin up, Sir!” Mirio said cheerfully.

Toshinori had been forgiving when Mirai told him that Midoriya now knew the secret of One for All. He seemed amused, if anything, that Midoriya managed to piece the puzzle together in a single train ride. The non-reaction lessened the weight of the guilt on his shoulders but only barely.

And this. His student’s hero name all over media outlets and it would only be a matter of time before they found his actual name. An actual name that would lead them to the ongoing case that surrounded him and the family that vanished and the kidnapping that connected him to the League.

The public would eat his story whole, like ravenous vultures tearing apart Prometheus.

Underground, the boy said. He wanted to be an Underground hero. Good thing, he supposed, considering his reputation would likely be slandered if the truth about his history was laid bare for the media and public to scrutinize.

Mirai wouldn't let it happen. He couldn't bear to fail him so terribly.

"Time to meet the parents," Gran muttered as the Chief of Police entered with Manual.

They walked in silence and Mirai wondered what he could say to the heroes and to the mothers Izuku mentioned. What could he say to the family of the boy he screwed up with? He couldn't ask for their forgiveness, nor did he deserve it, but he wanted a chance to do right by Midoriya. Manual opened the door and they filed inside the room. Mirai realized that all the patients were awake and sitting up.

Midoriya's family crowded around his bed in an obvious display of who was related to who. Midoriya's family were all touching him in some way; on his bare arms, his neck, his hands. They all appeared to have red-rimmed eyes and seemed oddly happy. The sight baffled him because wasn't his quirk supposed to be affecting them? Three women sat on one side, two appearing similar and another sticking out. Three others sat or stood on the other side of his bed. Present Mic, in his civilian attire, a boy with wild hair, and-

Mirai held in a curse as he met the inky black gaze of a familiar stranger. The staring made sense now, hindsight slapping him in the face without mercy. Of course he would stare at the man who failed to maintain his ward's safety.

The Chief began speaking before he could say anything, thankfully. If he had been given the opportunity to speak, he surely would have fumbled.

"So, you're the UA students who brought down the Hero Killer."

"We are," Endeavor's son replied evenly.

"Stain has severe injuries. He's suffering from burns and broken bones," he listed off. Mirai noted that Todoroki was steadily becoming more tense as the Chief spoke. "Right now, he's in the hospital under strict guard."

He went on to explain their situation, how things should go. Then he offered them another route, one less damaging to their futures.

“All that aside, we can discuss another option. Stain’s ice-related injuries could correspond with another hero’s quirk who arrived at the scene instead of Pyrice’s. The police could release a statement saying that Endeavor and this hero fought together to apprehend the hero killer. The only one of you that needs to be involved in the report at all is you, Surge.” Midoriya stiffened, his brows furrowed in confusion.

“Why me?” he asked in bewilderment.

The Chief’s eyes flicked to his family. “A video of the Hero Killer’s last public appearance has gone viral. He stated that you and All Might were the only worthy heroes.” Midoriya choked, eyes widening comically. “Residue of your support gear has been taken note of and your existence is no longer going to go unnoticed.”

“Residue…” He flushed to the roots of his hair. “You mean the glitter, don’t you?”

“I do,” he answered solemnly. “Precautions are being taken to keep your identity a secret. The last thing we want is for this to reveal your-” he glanced at Iida and Todoroki. “-past. Our plan is to give credit to Endeavor and Frost and mention that you had an encounter with him prior to his capture during the chaos in Hosu.

“The choice is up to you, however, if you wish to use this story or not.” He eyed all four of the students in the room. “You would be lauded as heroes, no doubt, but the repercussions you’d face would be inescapable.”

In the end, they left the credit to Endeavor and Frost. The Chief left and Mirai fought not to shift on his feet as Manual explained that they would be having their teaching licenses stripped away. Thankfully, they could renew it in time for work-studies, but Mirai doubted Midoriya would be joining him again.

“Hello,” Mirai began uneasily once Manual left. “I am Sir Nighteye.”

“We’re aware,” chirped the smaller of the pink-haired women. Her saccharine tone felt more like a warning than anything else.

“I would like to apologize for inconveniencing your son and drawing him into a situation that may bring him into unnecessary danger.” He bowed, low and sincere.

“S-Sir,” Midoriya squeaked. “Y-You don’t have to-”

“He doesn’t *sound* like an ass, Shouta,” drawled the short-haired woman. He rose from his bow and found her eyeing him with amusement. In a moment, it changed to steely indifference. “You haven’t been an ass to our son, right?”

“M-Mistu-” Midoriya stuttered.

“I admit that I was at first,” he confessed. “I regret my actions. Midoriya is a bright young man who deserves to be treated with respect and recognized for his talents.”

“Haiyama” The purple-haired boy corrected.

“Excuse me?” he asked, caught off guard.

“Haiyama” The purple-haired boy repeated. “That’s what he decided his new surname would be.”

“Alright,” Mirai said, confused but certainly not about to argue with them. “Haiyama.”

“Can’t fucking believe this shit,” Bakugo muttered.

“Can’t believe what?” Ochako inquired as they sat down for breakfast.

He slammed his bowl onto the table and glared at the surface like he could set it on fire. “Can’t believe Stain put stupid shitty Deku in the same regard as fucking *All Might.”*

Ah, jealousy. She was familiar with this particular emotion. Years of watching other kids obtain everything they wanted without having to worry about the money left over for food and bills had steeled her resolve to become a hero to help her family but that didn’t mean she didn’t long for what they had.

“And that man’s opinion is so respectable?” She scrunched up her face and shook her head. “Would you rather be the one with your hero name plastered all over the internet?”

“Yes,” he barked, taking an angry bite of his food.

Ochako leaned back in her chair. “I’m becoming a hero for the sort of

reasons Stain hates. I don't need fame but to get the money, I need to be high in ranking when we graduate." Scowling at the ceiling, she thought of how much she could give to her parents in just a few years. "I don't care what some psycho thinks about my motivations and I certainly don't want his respect. I'm helping people and helping my family by doing it. I think there's some honor in that."

"Course there fucking is, Round Face," Bakugo grunted, swallowing a gulp of water. "Never said I agreed with the fucking bastard."

Her fury lessened. "Thanks, Bakugo."

"Those stupid *heroes,"* Tomura hissed, slamming his fist onto the bar. "He was going to come with us, Kurogiri, I could see it." He thought of the way Izuku couldn't uncurl the fingers that kept his hands in an iron grip. He thought of the way Izuku pressed his face in his hand and closed his eyes, an act of trust Tomura had never been subjected to. "He *wanted* to stay with me and they took him away ."

Kurogiri passively offered him the glass he finished cleaning and he took the transparent object. Letting the fifth finger drop, he watched the glass disintegrate. As the dust settled on the wood, Tomura squeezed his eyes shut, remembering how Izuku clung to him. "Give me the newspaper." He ordered Kurogiri.

"I must warn you, it won't be pleasing."

"I don't care." He snarled through gritted teeth.

His Nomus didn't even make the front page. The only thing keeping him from destroying the paper was the number of times was the name plastered across the pages.

"Surge!"

Izuku's hero name. He was almost gaining more attention than Stain at this point. The realization had a grin growing across his face. If he couldn't have the coverage, at least the attention would go to Izuku and not just some lunatic with strong ideals.

"Tomura," Sensei said through his TV. "I think you should prepare for guests."

“Doctor,” All for One mused. “Remind me of Midoriya Izuku.”

The Doctor shuffled around and hummed. “Midoriya Izuku?” he echoed. “Ah! Yes, the special boy you had me-”

“Doctor.”

“Ahem, sorry, sir. You know how passionate I am about my work.” He adjusted his goggles, the mustache on his upper lip twitching as he chewed the inside of his cheek. “What would you like to know?”

“Where is his family?” All for One leaned on the arm of his chair. “Who did we give him back to, all those years ago?”

He thought about his answer, tapping his fingers against the metal surface of the table he stood by. “Well, sir, we had begun investing some of our research in him and Tomura enjoyed his presence greatly. We planned on keeping him and adjusting him to our world. You seemed pleased with Tomura having extra support and the progress I was making with him. Because we put so much effort into him, we attempted to locate his parents.

““His father was long gone and his parents were never married. We never found him. The mother was another story, however.” The Doctor made a discontented sound. “The men you hired to find her barely had to lift a finger to locate her. She was clever, though, and managed to evade them several times once she realized people were after her. During the boy’s second trial before we could remove his cast, we finally caught her. She had to be restrained so that she couldn’t use her quirk to rip the mens’ eyes from their sockets.”

All for One chuckled. “I think I’m beginning to remember, Doctor.”

“Apparently, she told her landlady something about being in danger and that if payments didn’t come, it was code for something. To placate her and let us take her son, we let her go.”

“Did we?” All for One asked with mild surprise.

“Yes, we paid the rent for her apartment for about seven years before we changed priorities and used our funds to fully support the Nomu projects.”

“And what became of the woman?”

“Well, sir, you were never fond of loose ends,” The Doctor said calmly.

“So?”

“You had her killed.”

Chapter End Notes

to be absolutely clear- this is NOT a shigaraki/deku fic

they're trauma bros who love each other- but not like that

Thank you for all the support!

discord, so you know when I update

Interlude: Inko

Chapter Notes

> Right, uh, I almost didn't post this because it's got some darker themes and such
>
> Warnings:
> Mentions of abuse, attempted murder of a child, stalking, murder, kidnapping
>
> Does this count as an unreliable narrator? I feel like it isn't.
>
> If any of this isn't your cup of tea, just skip to the end for notes. None of this is going to affect the present but there is some heavy foreshadowing.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Eight Years Ago

Inko rhythmically tapped her nails against the greasy, chipped wood of the table she sat at, staring at a gouge in the table that peeked out from under the napkin dispenser to keep her eyes from drifting to the two men who were seated at the bar on the other end of the diner. In a brief moment of impatience, she glanced at the clock, nearly groaning aloud when the damned arms had barely moved. The nail of her thumb scratched away the already chipped nail polish on her other thumb, the flecks of paint collecting beneath her hands on the table.

The men at the bar faced away from her, barely saying a word to one another. One of them was lean, the tips of his fingers torn up and scabbed over. He avoided using the lithe appendages, preferring to keep his palms face up and resting against the wood of the bar. The other was his companion’s opposite. Large and bulky, his voice rumbling through the air when he deigned to give his stalk-like friend an answer. He leaned onto the bar with his forearms, pointedly ignoring the blistered skin underneath the bandages he wrapped around them, apparently more prideful or more used to pain than his companion.

Their injuries were from their previous attempts to catch her. Never before had they been so bold as to remain within her eyesight, much less with their backs to her, for more than a second. They weren’t

friends of Hisashi's; he would have given her a warning if he sent people to find her. The pair weren't cops either. These were just some pricks tailing her.

As always, her thoughts circled back to Hisashi. When he left her for the first time, a fog smothered her thoughts, leaving her to drudge through life with a distant, barely-there awareness. She paid Izuku no mind. Not when he tried to follow her around the house, not when he tried to talk to her. Why should she give him the time of day when he took *everything from her?*

That single thought was like a splash of ice water being poured over her sleep-addled body. *Izuku.* Her son and his repulsive quirk messed everything up for her and Hisashi. He wouldn't have hurt her if he hadn't been so enraged, Inko knows that, so why had she been attempting to distance herself from thoughts of him? Izuku, asleep in another room of the apartment with a terrible quirk, was the reason Hisashi had gotten so furious.

The lingering tenderness in the soft skin of her face from the burns Hisashi gave her tingled suddenly when she moved.

That night, she had gone into Izuku's room and stood over him, watching his chest rise in fall, and remembered. She remembered the night Hisashi had come home from a rough day at work and she put on a movie. Half-way through the film, the world snapped into darkness. The change was so sudden and jarring, she almost didn't catch sight of the figure standing a few feet away from her. At first, she thought there was some sort of mirror effect.

But then the entity began to talk. It smiled at her and spat at her, its moods changing with every jeer and insult it hurled at her, hitting her where the words would hurt the most.

And, like the whole thing was a hallucination, an illusion, the darkness was replaced by the familiar scene of her living room.

Hisashi's temperamental mood came back full swing.

Remembering the fury burning in Hisashi's eyes, Inko stood over her son and wondered if she should simply put an end to their problems right then.

Midoriya Inko raised her hand, feeling out the little drum of her son's heart.

And dropped it.

She took one step back, stumbling. Then five, nearly knocking her head into the door. Inko locked herself up in her room, staring at her ceiling as she struggled to control her breathing. No. *No.* This wasn't his fault. None of it was.

She couldn't bear to look at him after that night. She couldn't stand his slight resemblance to his father or his presence.

Months passed and Inko withered.

She awoke to someone shaking her and she shoved Izuku away, the thought of his hands near her, the thought of his quirk ever taking hold of her again-

"Inko," said a voice she only heard in her dreams anymore.

All at once, she was awake, her hands quaking with disbelief. "Hisashi?" She stared at the man who loomed over her and tears welled in her eyes. He sat down, his eyes never leaving hers, and wrapped his arms around her. He held her and she smothered herself with his shirt, desperate to know that this was reality and not some sick trick her mind conjured alive.

"You're back," she whispered.

"Not for long." Inko's arms tightened around him and he laughed. "I have a solution." he proclaimed with triumph, his quiet voice the only thing that held her attention.

"For what?" She asked, pulling away from his embrace to meet his gaze again.

"For everything," he said, his eyes alight with something akin to excitement. "It may take years but I know how to make everything normal again. We just need to prepare for it."

("You don't have a quirk," Inko repeated to her son several times. "You're quirkless.")

Hisashi didn't return after his first visit but they met at rendezvous points sparingly and, armed with the knowledge that he would someday, Inko's life regained its vibrancy.

Their last meeting had taken place over a week, much longer than any

of the other meetings. Hisashi told her he made a deal with the woman who collected their rent. Inko knew Taira to be a brash, blunt, and lethargic woman. She knew she could care less about Inko's safety or her status as her tenant. It was the fact that Hisashi offered to pay her a separate sum of money for informing him if Inko ever stopped paying rent. If the payment was ever late.

He was paranoid, (The smell of the singed motel room burned in her nostrils. Her hands shook as his hateful gaze turned on her.) in a grim mood. He had to go deeper to gain his place, he told her. He couldn't meet her anymore. She was terrified of being alone again, and she said as much. The burn marks marring her skin itched underneath the layer of makeup she covered them with. (Hisashi hated seeing them. And if he hated them, she needed to get rid of them.)

She wondered if Izuku would starve before she returned. Before she left, Inko acted rudely. Called him a problem. Said she was sick of All Might reruns.

Her hands twitched with the desire to tear them from their barstools and demand to know why they were after her. She wanted to go home. Hisashi could make Izuku normal again, he just needed time. He promised her everything would go back to the way it was. He promised he could fix Izuku.

When she arrived at the apartment later that night, the door was ajar.

The stalking started after she fled.

The rent was due in two weeks. That meant fourteen more days of them following her around and attempting to catch her off guard. Fourteen more days of her evading them.

Inko paid for her coffee and left the diner, the wind chilling the air biting into her dainty hands and exposed face. She strolled away from the warmly lit building briskly and rubbed her hands together.

The odd pair left not a minute after her.

Two weeks, and Hisashi would come for her.

Resolutely ignoring the slashes riddling her body, Inko clawed her hands and jerked them back, ripping whatever she could from the

man's body. He dropped like a puppet whose strings had been cut and she gasped for breath, the frigid air making her lungs constrict. Her wounds pulsed with pain and she put her shaking hands over the biggest one. A knife quirk. Why did thugs always have knife quirks? He was alone, for once, his buddy nowhere in sight, and Inko's gut churned with the knowledge that there was another, much larger, hurdle to jump over before she could return to her home.

"Thanks for getting rid of that snob,"

Shrieking, she whipped around to meet the meaty fist of the missing half of the duo. Slamming into the wall, Inko screamed and thrust her hands out, desperately and blearily trying to locate his eyes-

His hands wrapped around hers with ease, enveloping her small hands and squeezing. "It's nice knowing you're so weak I didn't even have to use my quirk," he smirked, his voice carrying over her cries. "What was that weird feeling around my eyes, huh? Were you about to do to me what you did to him?"

His grip tightened, crushing hers further, and the pain knocked her out.

Inko blinked awake, the side of her face aching. Her hands and the knife wounds were bandaged but she was bound and unable to move.

"Ms. Midoriya," called a disembodied voice. "It's a pleasure to meet you."

She threw threats at them, telling them about Hisashi's deal, how he would know she was gone and come after her. But the chipper tone that this "Doctor" talked in never changed. Then they proposed a deal. They would take Izuku off her hands and she would let him go quietly. When she refused, he rephrased, saying this was more of a polite gesture.

They already had Izuku and weren't planning on giving him back.

As she stared into her kidnapper's eyes, filled with bloodlust and psychotic glee, Inko knew there was no getting away. They had let her out but she was stumbling and injured and stiff from being in the same position for so long. They sent him after her to let him finish the job and her hands were still wrapped in bandages.

Hisashi would find Izuku. He would find him and he would fix him.

Inko ran at her attacker, a shout passing her lips as they curled into a snarl.

His grin only widened.

Chapter End Notes

Kay, in short:
This is Inko's perspective of after Hisashi dipped out. She lost most of herself when he left and just went through the motions. She had the epiphany that Izuku was the reason Hisashi left and almost used her quirk to kill him. After that, she couldn't look at him. Months later, Hisashi woke her up, saying he could fix Izuku. He left again and they met up sometimes. He was getting paranoid. He said they couldn't meet any more and when she went home, someone had broken into her apartment. Cue stalking, Inko leads her stalkers around for a bit before they catch up to her. She maims and kills one before being injured and kidnapped by the other. She finds out that they have Izuku and won't give him back. They let her loose and then have her kidnapper kill her.

As I said, dark themes.

Thank you for reading and leaving comments and/or kudos

discord

Familiarity

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Shouto could hear Izuku shivering from his own bed and turned over on his side to face his friend. He was curled tightly into himself, face scrunched in discomfort. Being too cold or hot had never been a problem for him because of the nature of his quirk, but he had nearly developed hypothermia on multiple occasions because of his stubborn reluctance to use his fire while Endeavor was present.

Izuku's family had been kicked out, for lack of a better term. Nine people in one hospital room was not allowed, much less while in the aftermath of a disaster like Hosu. The moment they left, Izuku seemed to deflate, putting his hands over his arms and hunching over himself. He made conversation with Shouto and Iida, but his mood dipped severely after their departure.

"Izuku?" he called quietly.

He opened his eyes and met Shouto's. They blinked at each other for a few seconds before he stuttered out a soft, "Y-Yeah?"

"You're cold," he stated bluntly. As if to prove his statement, another shiver racked his frame.

His eyes widened with worry and he sat up, a shade of pink overcoming his face. "I'm sorry! I didn't mean to disturb you," he said quickly.

Feeling his mouth pull into a small frown, Shouto shook his head and sat up, too. "That's not what I meant." Pursing his lips, he tried to find a way to get his point across. "Would you like to be warm?"

Izuku tilted his head to one side in confusion but nodded. Taking his self-imposed cue, Shouto removed himself from his own bed and padded over to Izuku's. "Here," he said simply, offering his left arm.

An expression of befuddlement crossed his face as he looked from Shouto's arm to his face. "And I suppose you'll just stand there while I hug your arm?" He asked, hesitantly reaching for his hand.

"Sure." Shouto didn't see the issue if it made him more comfortable.

Izuku laughed, the sound pleasant to his ears, and clasped their hands together. The two of them examined the connection for several moments before Shouto felt Izuku tugging his arm. He shuffled closer, his hips pressing against the bed, and Izuku huffed.

“What?”

Giving him an amused but exasperated glance, he tugged on his arm again. “I’m not letting you stand there for the rest of the night.” He replied firmly. “Plus, I’m sure it’d be warmer to hug more than just your arm.”

Despite being more or less of a social recluse for the majority of his existence, Shouto could read between the lines and understand what was being offered. Once Izuku shifted to give him more room, he climbed in the bed alongside Izuku. Unsure of where to go from here, he offered his arm to Izuku again. He gently grabbed the proffered arm and put the appendage around his shoulders, patting the hand once he released it, and slowly leaned both of them back into the mattress. The rough pads of his fingers trailed the skin of his left arm and Izuku shuddered at the touch.

He halted the motion immediately, pulling himself back to check and see if he messed up. “Sorry,” he whispered, remembering how scarred that arm was. The scar tissue of his own scar remained sensitive over the years and he could only imagine the sensitivity that the damage he sustained would cause. Cursing himself, he opened his mouth to apologize again, only for Izuku to cut him off.

“It’s- Wait, it’s fine,” he assured, using his hand to put Shouto’s back where it was on his arm. “Your right hand is kinda cold, is all,” he murmured, a less noticeable shudder passing through him again when his right hand made contact again. He pressed his face into Shouto’s chest and sighed. “Thank you.”

He didn’t know what to say back, the situation much too foreign for him to be able to muster up a proper reply, so he curled his body around Izuku and tried his best to keep them both at a desirable temperature. Their new situation was rather comfortable, if a bit unfamiliar. Shouto couldn’t remember the last time anyone other than his siblings touched him with such tender care, much being the one holding someone else.

Izuku’s breathing slowly evened out, his body growing lax as time passed, leaving Shouto to think.

Hosu's Chief of police had mentioned something about Izuku's past. The past he was referring to likely took place before Aizawa or the Hatsumes stepped into the picture. The past where Izuku was alone and without a family.

He cut off the train of thought before it could take him somewhere unsavory, and decided to focus on other things instead.

Shouto hoped that Mic would let him continue his internship. If he went home now, the old man would have had no time to blow off steam. While he may be a bastard, his father only took pride in his own accomplishments. Sometimes the media would paint him as the one to take down a villain, even if he only arrived on the scene to help with the takedown, and the miscrediting enraged him. Now that he's been given credit for apprehending the Hero Killer, something he wanted to do himself but wasn't able to, Shouto would bet he was more than irritable.

The fact that Shouto and Izuku had been the ones to deal the most damage definitely didn't soothe his fury.

Finding Izuku and Iida with Stain had surprised him, in all honesty. Up until he caught sight of the flare, he had been evacuating citizens and steering them clear of where the Nomu were wreaking havoc. Mic had given him orders to help people but not to fight unless strictly necessary. The ensuing fight between the three of them felt so short in hindsight. He couldn't even remember much of when they patched up Iida's wound.

Remembering the sight of the winged Nomu taking off with Izuku made his arms subconsciously tighten around the smaller body he held. He had been sitting on the open end of one of the ambulances as a paramedic took a look at the injuries he sustained during and before the fight when people started shouting to duck. Chaos erupted as the creature flew away with Izuku and the Hero Killer managed to make one last stand.

The wait for the heroes to return with Izuku had been torture. Alone and exhausted, he avoided his father until Mic came back, an injured and unconscious Izuku with him.

Being reprimanded for doing the right thing felt disingenuous but he understood the point they were attempting to get across. He understood where they went wrong and how the perfect situation should have gone. But there were no perfect scenes, no immaculate

crimes. Stain's certainly weren't. Shouto agreed that the law should be obeyed, but there were instances where the spirit of the law is more important than the letter of it.

Of course, they should all avoid situations like this in the future. Definitely.

Sighing, he dropped his face into Izuku's hair and closed his eyes, relishing in the comfort Izuku's presence gave him.

Hitoshi witnessed the glorious emotions flickering through his dad's eyes as he stared at Izuku and Todoroki. Cuddling, he should add. Dad was staring at Izuku and Todoroki cuddling in a hospital bed. Todoroki's arm was thrown over Izuku, whose face was shoved into the crook of Todoroki's neck and there was not an *inch* of space between them. Not one. Their legs were intertwined and Todoroki's face was half-hidden by Izuku's hair.

If he hadn't been so entertained by Dad's current crisis, he might have started thinking of how he would react later on, but watching his dad go through the five stages of grief while looking at his almost-adopted son cuddling another teenager was enough to stall everything else. He took a picture of Dad and the two boys, knowing Pops would whine betrayal for weeks if they didn't immortalize these moments.

"I didn't realize they were…" He gestured in their general direction with one hand before dropping it back to his side. Tension hung awkwardly in the air as the seconds passed by and Hitoshi finally let out a bark of laughter.

They shifted at the sudden noise, Izuku burrowing further into Todoroki as Todoroki pulled him closer. Dad's face somehow reached a new level of hilarious.

Hilarity aside, Hitoshi doubted that this was anything other than innocent snuggling. Izuku had been deprived of human contact for years, of course he would seek it out at any chance. He trusted Todoroki to be a decent person, too, and not take advantage of or overwhelm him. That didn't stop this from being any less amusing though.

Rolling his eyes, (honestly, he once told Hitoshi he found two of his students in the middle of practically eating each other's faces and *this*

made him freeze?) he approached Izuku's side of the bed. "Izuku," He prodded at his shoulder with a finger. "Hey, get up before you kill Dad." The only response he received was a half-hearted grumble so he took the next logical step and gave up immediately.

"Welp," he snapped his fingers, swinging his arm, and shook his head. "Guess they'll just stay like that." He stared at Dad head-on. *"Forever."*

Todoroki moved before Dad could, lifting his head to blink at them blearily.

"Sho…" Izuku whined at the lost contact, using one of his hands to pull him back.

"It's time to get up," he said gently, ears turning red as he averted his eyes.

Izuku tugged again, burying his face in his shoulder. "But it's so nice." His voice was muffled by poor, poor Todoroki, who looked back at them and then down at Izuku curled up against him.

"Yamazawa and Aizawa are here," he said flatly.

Izuku didn't give any indication that he heard him at first, a few seconds passing without consequence before he peeled himself away at a painstaking pace and turned to face them.

"Dad, Toshi." He flushed a marvelous shade of pink. "Hello."

"Izuku," Dad began. "Is there something you would like to tell me?"

Floundering under Dad's heavy gaze, Izuku shifted back, meaning he pushed himself against Todoroki again. "I-I was cold," he admitted, looking away. Folding his arms over himself, he ducked his head. "I couldn't sleep."

The confession quickly flipped the aura in the room.

"I know that I should be used to it by now," he continued shakily. "I-I *was* used to being cold, but all of you were so *warm,* and then you were gone and-"

"Hey, we're here," Dad assured him, stepping closer. He offered his hand and Izuku took it gratefully. "We're here."

"And we aren't going anywhere," Hitoshi added, sitting on the end of the bed and nudging Izuku's foot.

Izuku nodded rapidly, his tearful eyes filled with hope.

“The police and several heroes, myself, your dad, and the heroes you interned with included, will be doing damage control and protection for your identity,” Yamada informed him the day he was discharged. “But, listen, even with all of us, there’s no taking back that fact that your hero name’s been plastered over every media outlet out there. You’re going to be getting a lot more attention now, ya dig?”

Izuku nodded, pushing down the panic and discomfort that his new circumstances brought on. The police had taken his statements and he really just wanted to leave the hospital. They were forced to exit through the back of the hospital because of how many reporters were trying to barge inside.

His internship with Nighteye, Gran Torino, and Mirio ended rather quickly. He was prohibited from doing physically demanding tasks for the remainder of his internship, so he worked old cases with Nighteye instead. His companions were quite obviously more tactile with him now that they were given the chance to be. He got his hair ruffled and arms thrown around his shoulders. He almost burst into tears when Mirio asked for a high five, embarrassingly enough.

Gran Torino shoved a large, droopy hat onto his head before he left with Nighteye and Mirio, grumbling about disguises and keeping his head down. Izuku thanked him sincerely and received a fond thump on the head for it. They departed shortly after, Mirio and Nighteye acting as shields to any passerby that gave them a second glance. A few people stopped them to say hi to Mirio and ask for a picture or something else and each time, Izuku half hid behind Nighteye’s tall figure.

No one noticed him and he thanked his small stature and plain features.

Until he bumped into someone at their final stop, causing them to drop a bunch of thin binders. They gathered them quickly but when he offered the final one to the stranger, she met his eyes and gasped.

“Surge?” She asked, loud and incredulous.

Chaos spawned from there. People turned at the sound of her proclamation of his hero name and zeroed in on him. The hat did shit

for him now, but that didn't mean he would have allowed it to be ripped off of his head by some stranger. He yelped at the sudden light and stumbled back from the force of the person's jerk.

"Hey!" Mirio barked, snatching the hat back. "Back off!"

The crowd amassed around them and Izuku flinched at the audible click of someone taking a photo of him. Mirio put the hat back on his head and Izuku clutched at its sides to make it cover his face. Someone grabbed his arm and he nearly shrieked, knocking into Nighteye's side when he ripped himself away.

It reminded him of the reporters at the UA gate. Of the hallway when the alarm sounded at lunch.

But this was so much worse because everyone here was after *him.*

He hated the noise of their shouts overlapping as they called his name. Hero and *civilian.* They knew both, which should not have been a surprise, but panic swept away all coherent thoughts. He couldn't breathe as Nighteye and Mirio pressed into him, yelling at the crowd to leave them alone to no avail.

"I'm going to do something a little crazy!" Mirio said to them. Izuku felt his arms warp both him and Nighteye and-

Everything vanished.

Nothing existed in this place. Not noise, not sight. Izuku didn't fight the disappearance of his senses, thankful for the lack of them.

He tried to breathe.

He couldn't.

Nausea roiled in his- there was no stomach, actually. Not really. There was no throat for bile to rise within or lungs to suck in too-quick gulps of air with. No water to pool into his eyes as he struggled to live and felt *nothing.*

And then-

Light exploded around him and Mirio's arms tightened around them. The three of them smacked into something and Izuku scrambled away to vomit.

"A little?" Nighteye shouted hoarsely. "A *little crazy,* Mirio- *hugh-"*

The rancid smell of vomit hung in the air as Mirio attempted to console his puking companions.

“Look, I’m sorry, but we’re out, aren’t we?” He gestured wildly at the park they had interrupted peace in. “I have no idea where we are, but it’s definitely away!”

Izuku passed out.

“-another way to get out of that, Mirio.” Izuku turned his head to see Nighteye pacing in front of him. “I understand that it was stressful-”

“M- Haiyama was going to pass out!” Mirio argued.

“He passed out anyway!” Nighteye snapped.

The previous events came back to him and he inhaled sharply, checking to be sure that he could breathe and feel things again. He broke out into a coughing fit, mouth dry and bitter.

“W-What happened?” he choked out, throat burning from the residual bile.

Mirio shrunk away from Nighteye when his glare seemed to insist that he respond. “I used my quirk on both of you to get us all out of the train station. It mostly went according to plan? I knew that the first time can be really freaky-”

“But you recently suffered from near suffocation and was likely in the middle of a panic attack, so the added stress knocked you out.”

“Yeah,” Mirio agreed contritely. “I’m sorry, M- Haiy-”

“Izuku,” he interrupted, rasping his name as he sat up. The world spun and blacked out before slowly righting itself. “And thanks.”

Both of them sputtered.

“You’re right, it was an overall terrible experience,” Izuku said tersely. “but I don’t know how else we would have gotten away.”

“This doesn’t change that fact that you barely gave us any forewarning,” Nighteye groused. “Did you even know what would happen when you used your quirk on us?”

“Of course I did!” Mirio squawked in offense. “Gran Torino and I tried it a few times after we were sure I could keep something in my hands when I go intangible. I knew it would be safe. Jarring, but safe.”

Izuku had a feeling Mirio would get another earful about public quirk usage later, if the mutters he caught from Nighteye were correct, but he let the conversation end there.

“So, you finally woke up?” Izuku startled at the sound of Mitsu’s voice and belatedly realized that they were in the Hatsume household. “The rest of them are out getting food, so brave for disaster.” She nursed a steaming cup of tea between her hands, eyes flickering bronze for a moment before melting back into gold.

Dinner was a crowded ordeal since Ayumi insisted that Mirio and Nighteye stay for a meal. After the initial quiet where people began to dig into their food, a raucous broke out, Mei and Hitoshi making gibes at each other that included an awful amount of puns, Mirio joining in at one point to bring their face-off to a whole new level. Yamada and Mitsu talked together with Nighteye about something and Izuku snickered to himself at how distinctly out of place Nighteye appeared between their boisterous personalities. Ayumi and Aizawa simply watched things unfold with Izuku, only adding to the conversation when they wanted to say something.

Izuku looked around the table and smiled, glad to be somewhere familiar.

The Doctor hummed as he clicked his pen, an eerie hue cast over him from the Nomu tanks. These next Nomu would not be ready for some time, no, but they were still on schedule. Oh, he hoped All for One would be pleased with this batch. They had such a quantity to prepare compared to their first attempts and the Doctor hoped they wouldn’t simply be served on a platter for the heroes to destroy as they had been in Hosu. Pity, how their creations were made and taken in such rapid succession.

Perhaps he should have a word with All for One about Tomura’s impulsive actions concerning the Nomu. Or, well, perhaps not, considering he disallowed his successor from throwing out all the Nomu at once. All for One knew, he simply wanted Tomura to understand. All for One always looked out for the Doctor.

“That recruit with the seemingly impervious quirk,” All for One drawled, calling the Doctor’s attention immediately. “He seems familiar.”

As he always did when he needed it, the Doctor filled in the blanks. “Oh, yes,” he began excitedly. “We hired him several years ago, sir. Remember how you asked about the Midoriya child?”

“Ah, thank you, Doctor.” He hummed, leaning back into his chair, the wires around him shifting as he moved. “That would have bothered

me for ages.”

“It is always odd when you can’t remember a familiar face,” the Doctor chuckled. “I was visiting a long-time patient, the one whose successor is the man you think Tomura may partner with later on. There was a man who shadowed my visit, likely to make sure my actions weren’t ill-intended.” Honestly, he was a doctor, what did these people think he would do to a comatose old man? “I don’t know what it was about him, but he reminded me of someone and I can’t for the life of me remember who.”

“I guess even you forget things,” All for One noted with amusement. “Perhaps it was a person who we used for the Nomu Projects.”

No, the Doctor would remember if it was that. Each of his subjects’ faces was etched into the backs of his eyelids, their names seared into his memory. But if not a Nomu, then would it be another patient? Who had he known that would resemble that man? Who had-

“Huh,” The Doctor blinked, the realization dawning on him.

“Have you remembered who it was?” All for One hummed. “I suppose nothing can escape you for long, Doctor.”

“No…” He trailed off.

All for One turned to the Doctor, his sudden quiet luring his attention. “What is it?”

The Doctor looked at him, a smile creeping onto his face. “I’ve just remembered a question I never received an answer to.” He recalled the man’s face, his features placing themselves so easily now that he knew where to fit them. “And, my, my, is the answer intriguing.”

Chapter End Notes

woo 70k!

Thank you for the support

Also, more foreshadowing...

have a nice day

Mei and Hitoshi play dress-up with Izuku

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

After the train station incident, Izuku adamantly argued against going outside until they had to go back to school. Honestly, he didn't see why people were so interested in him. Endeavor and Frost had been the ones given credit for Stain's capture! They should be the ones fending off the public! Not him.

Okay, objectively, the public's interest in him made sense. Kind of. Not really. So, what if Stain put him on par with All Might? That- That didn't need to mean anything. Why do people want to glorify the opinions of a serial killer anyway? His ideals were fine but his methods were absolute shit. And why was All Might the only true hero? Hm? Was it his 'Symbol of Peace' schtick? Because, otherwise, he was almost completely the same in regards to other heroes. Sure, his ratings and statistics were through the roof, but why did All Might's success mean other heroes were failures?

He was as much of a celebrity as the rest of them. He could throw around his weight and UA was currently having him do that to bring in funds and tell students' families that they are safe. All Might is a figurehead. He is a hero as a person and is one as an occupation. And, though his knowledge isn't public, All Might came from a legacy, from a strength forged in blood and haunted by power gained by time.

Thinking about Stain's ideology reminded him eerily of the answer he wrote for the written part of the entrance exam. *"Being a hero does not mean the same thing it did during the Vigilante era or beforehand. It is an occupation."* His own thoughts and ideals were interwoven with Stain's. The realization unsettled him, making him shift in discomfort.

Heroes weren't what they used to be. That was a fact. Heroics had changed, and that was okay. What wasn't okay was that the change had gone in one of the worst directions. Izuku knew for a fact that there were good, honest heroes working their asses off to make the world better and save people, but that didn't take away from the fact that so many heroes just postured for cameras now.

Less wealthy or well-known locations were left practically to their own devices against heroes because *they never patrolled there.* Heroics

is a career and people go into it for the money all the time. That's fine, people need money to survive. But that also means hero deserts are not as rare as they should be. The more screen time a hero gets, the more money the Commission gives them, and if their popularity goes down, so do they. Some heroes aren't bothered or don't possess the awareness to figure out who exactly they are abandoning. Some are bothered and aware but aren't willing to sacrifice their livelihood to help the people in less televised areas.

"You look troubled," Hitoshi said from underneath two cats.

"Thinking about hero deserts."

"If it helps, Dad patrols those places a lot," he consoled. "The citizens there know how to take care of themselves and be sneaky about public quirk usage. And there are a *ton* of vigilantes that he works with, too."

Izuku opened his mouth but paused, looking around. "Where is D- Ai- hm." He pressed his hands into his face in frustration, ignoring Hitoshi's unstifled laughter. "What?" he whined. "N-Nothing feels right anymore! I've known Mitsu and Ayumi for way longer and I still call them by their first names. Why is this harder?"

"Don't get too worked up over this, they aren't going to get mad at you for not calling them mom or dad." A concerning sort of smile stretched across Hitoshi's face. "If you're that unsure, just meet halfway."

"Meet half- What does that *mean,* Toshi?"

"Just say what feels right." He shrugged. "It's what I did before I got comfortable calling them my dads."

"Like… Dadzawa?" Izuku's face burned when Hitoshi chuckled. Fuck, that was stupid. Why did saying things out loud make them sound so much more idiotic?

"Yeah!" Hitoshi cheered. "That's a good one."

"And he won't have a problem with it?" Izuku questioned hesitantly. The nickname was certainly no 'Deku' but Bakugo had stopped liking 'Kacchan' so Izuku figured it would be safer to make sure there would be no unpleasant reactions.

Hitoshi shook his head, waving off his concerns. "Nah, nothing like that. Actually, he'll probably be happy, in his own caterpillar way."

“Okay, um, where is D-Dadzawa?”

“Once he wakes up from his nap we can ask him, but I think Pops said he went to the police station.”

Shouta scrutinized the mugshot. “You’re sure?”

Tsukauchi nodded. “He doesn’t go by Kobayashi Hisashi anymore, though. His alias in the yakuza became Dragon.”

“He’s involved with the yakuza,” Shouta shot him a sharp glance. “Why?”

Nighteye procured his own case file. “I’ve been running an investigation on the particular group that Dragon has been found in. Our current information about his activities while he’s been active as Dragon or when he joined are still sparse but we have… what might be a lead.” Nighteye looked away, apparently uncomfortable with whatever this lead is.

“Well,” Shouta prompted. This was the man who abandoned Izuku. Shouta wanted to find him and kick the bastard in the shins. “The lead, Nighteye.”

“The reason I’m investigating this section of the yakuza, in particular, is because of what they’re selling. Quirk-erasing bullets. They’ve been in the woodworks for years, rumors of a plan to create them dating back several years.”

“Haiyama said that the main reason his parents left was because of his quirk.” Tsukauchi tapped the unopened case file of the yakuza case. “We think that Dragon may have gotten involved with the yakuza to find a way to erase his son’s quirk.”

Now he understood why Nighteye was hesitant to say this. “And his mother?” Shouta found himself saying. “Do we still have nothing new on her?”

“We followed her last known transactions and where she appeared before she dropped off the face of the earth,” Tsukauchi pointed at the map pinned to the wall. “Tracking her whereabouts is a hassle, considering most of the places she visited aren’t the most dedicated to keeping records, but we have some city cameras on our side and a

couple of witnesses with good memories."

"For months, she returned to this establishment," Nighteye pointed at a tack stuck through the location of a motel. "It was hell to find, but we have records of her meeting with a man every single time. The owner said that he recognized Dragon as the man she met with, saying that he was a 'rat bastard that burnt the room each time he was there'. This was their rendezvous spot."

Tsukauchi then pointed at the string line that followed an entirely separate path. "The meet-ups gradually became less frequent until they completely halted. The owner never saw either of them again and is still bitter about the ruined room. These locations are where Midoriya Inko was last seen going to. She never stayed for more than a day or two and the locations put her at a progressing distance from Haiyama, who was left alone in their apartment at the time. Sometime during the days Midoriya Inko was hopping from place to place, Haiyama was abducted by the League of Villains."

"We believe Midoriya Inko was running from these two individuals." Nighteye held up a small stack of photos, all of them containing two figures. "They caught up to her, which is where Okita Satoru met his demise. He was killed by Midoriya Inko, who used her quirk to mutilate him. His body was never found but his eyes, blood, teeth, etc. were strewn across the ground. The case was never connected to her until now. The other man disappears, never exiting through the mouth of the alley."

"The League's warper likely transported them out, taking the body with them." Tsukauchi sighed. "Then there is nothing. The trail ends and any existing evidence of Midoriya Inko is nowhere to be found. The best guess we have is that when the League decided to keep Haiyama, they also thought it would be best to tie up loose ends."

Shouta didn't like what this implied. "So, our working theory is that she is dead." He summarised bluntly. He gestured at the large man in the photo. "And what about him? Who is he?"

"We were lucky that those cameras even existed to catch their silhouettes," Tsukauchi said tiredly. "The quality is too crappy to give us anything other than his basic features. Muscular, blonde, approximate height and weight. With years between us and the evidence, our information isn't what it could be."

"Our best option is to continue to observe Dragon and eventually

detain him," Nighteye said. "My investigation will require more time to accumulate the necessary information but in a few months a raid may take place."

Shouta left the police station with grim thoughts swirling in his head. He had permission to fill Hizashi in on the situation but Izuku was not considered someone who needed to know. Relief unbiddenly bubbled within him despite his sour mood. Izuku would find out eventually, but Shouta loathed the day he would realize why both of his parents disappeared.

Anger joined the plethora of emotions within him at the thought of Izuku blaming himself for Dragon leaving. He was still unlearning the habits of his old life, still replacing the urge to stamp down his quirk with the knowledge that he didn't have to anymore. Hearing that his father left to find a way to permanently get rid of his quirk and that his mother was likely kidnapped and subsequently killed because the League wanted to keep him was not going to leave him in the best of places mentally.

He walked into his home to the comforting sound of Hizashi humming, the smell of dinner reaching the entrance.

A thud and a yelp came from the living room and Shouta swiftly made his way over. At the end of the hallway, Izuku almost knocked into him, shouting, "Dadzawa!" with a bright smile on his blushing face.

Dadzawa?

"See," Hitoshi said from behind Izuku. "He's smiling. It's not even his creepy one."

"It's okay, right?" Izuku asked in a rush. "I- Toshi said you wouldn't mind, and I trust him but I just want to make sure-"

Shouta ruffled his hair, eliciting a squeak from the kid. "I like it," he decided. After all, it was somewhat better than the 'Eraserdad' Hitoshi had initially settled upon.

"Honestly, I don't know why you're doubting this plan, Izuku," Hitoshi said, straight-faced, as he looked at the abomination that used to be his adopted sibling.

“Yeah, Zuzu!” Mei agreed as she nearly poked out one of his eyes to shove bulky heart-shaped sunglasses onto his face. “This is foolproof!” Hitoshi laughed at the absurd shade of pink that colored the glasses and stepped forward to fix the tie wrapped around Izuku’s neck. It hung on top of the jacket he wore, loosely and terribly knotted.

“There.” He finished the knot, smirking as he said, “Now no one will think you’re you.”

Izuku pouted. “Hey, I’m not that bad at it,”

Hitoshi shared a glance with Mei. “You are,” they said in chorus.

“Still, all of this feels kind of… unnecessary?” He waved his arms around to put the fringe hanging from his jacket on display. “And won’t this just make more people look at me?”

Mei slammed a bright red bowler hat over his curly hair. “Exactly, Zuzu. But they’ll be so disgusted by your fashion sense and utter disregard for style that they won’t be able to look at you long enough to figure out who you are.”

“Isn’t the shirt I’m wearing mine?” Izuku asked, going for the zipper of his sparkling silver fringe jacket.

Hitoshi grabbed his hand, and kept them down while Mei put tiny flashing lights on the rim of his hat. “Do you really want to know the answer to that question?”Hitoshi asked, raising an eyebrow. Mei made an ‘mmhmm’ sound absentmindedly as she put on the final touches.

“Where did you even find these pants?” Izuku asked, looking down at the purple and orange monstrosity he wore on his legs. Blue appeared here and there amongst the patches of clashing patterns. They were loose enough to allow him to wear his uniform pants underneath, which was what made them the pair he would wear.

“In Pops’ secret box of clothes he’s sworn to never wear again and burn when he has the chance.” Hitoshi shivered. “I never want to look in there again. My eyes hurt just thinking about what I saw in there.”

“I think he’s done.” Mei stepped back with him, grinning like a madwoman. “His looks are *criminal.”*

She’s got that right, Hitoshi thought as he looked away and rubbed his eyes. *What we’ve done* should *be illegal.*

They walked him out to their parents and he is *so* glad Mei thought to find a camera because all four of them choked on something the moment Izuku entered their field of vision. He's never seen such synchronization between all of them.

Ayumi scrutinized the outfit. *"I'm glad I don't see the same colors all of you do, but what I can see is still terrible."*

Mei slapped Hitoshi on the back, knocking the air out of him and making him wheeze. "Our job is done," she said proudly. How she could be proud, Hitoshi didn't know, but he certainly took revelry in the constipated expression on Dad's face.

Mitsu, once she got over her coughing fit, was absolutely howling in laughter. Pops was covering his flushed face with both hands and refusing to look at Izuku for more than a second or two.

"Time for school," Hitoshi reminded them all, adorning an evil grin.

They were not, in fact, stopped because someone recognized him as Surge, but because a citizen saw Izuku on the sidewalk and had to make sure he was okay.

Izuku responded, "You don't like it?" in the most innocent voice. Mei and Hitoshi bursting into laughter only spurred the horrified citizen to get a quick get away. The citizen gave his regards before scampering off and they resumed their walk to UA.

Alone with Hitoshi outside of classroom 1-A, Izuku sighed, ready to shed his headache-inducing clothes, when Hitoshi stopped him. "What now?" he groaned. "I have three top layers on and two pants, I'm melting, Toshi. Melting!"

"I want to see their faces," He waved his phone in his hand. "Don't you?"

Izuku rolled his eyes but gave in. Not wasting any time, he turned, opened the door, and walked through.

Hitoshi would forever treasure the video of his classmates' outraged reactions, Bakugo's and Aoyama's especially.

Izuku knocked hesitantly on the door in front of him. “Hello? It’s Haiyama.”

For a moment there was no sound, then a scuffle, and the door opened to reveal All Might in his powered-down form. He offered a small smile. “I almost forgot about the name change, Young Haiyama. Thank you for agreeing to meet with me.”

After the rescue training he had the class do, All Might had asked Izuku to meet with him after school. The meeting would cut into his training with Shouto but his friend said that it was okay. At least Izuku knew what the talk would probably be about and there wasn’t some overarching terrible thing for Izuku to be worried about.

Izuku stepped into the room and set down his backpack against the couch. “This is about Mirio’s quirk, right?” he asked once the door was closed.

All Might nodded. “I apologize for unnecessarily bringing you in on this secret.” He picked a couple of picture frames off of the desk and handed them to Izuku. “But I can’t say that you finding these hasn’t brought some joy to my life. I don’t have many pictures of my predecessor.”

They were the two photos Izuku found while on the way to Gran Torino’s with Nighteye.

“Nedzu has eradicated any traces of One for All from the internet, so no one will be able to find out the same way you did.”

“That’s good,” Izuku commented, still staring at the photos in his hands. He carefully handed them back. “But you guys do have a good cover story for how his quirk suddenly developed, right?”

All Might chuckled sheepishly. “Yes, I suppose that is also a decent preventative measure.” He placed the photos back in their previous spots. “The best we can do is say that Young Mirio’s quirk went through a drastic change because of the stress he faced while in Hosu. Those he already spoke to about the change in his quirk thankfully only knew about the fact that he could now make other things as intangible as himself.”

“Do you mind if I ask about your quirk before One for All?”

All Might hesitated, then faced Izuku fully. “I have a feeling this will further tarnish your image of me, but you deserve to know.” Cerulean eyes met his own, haunted and wistful. “Before One for All, I was quirkless.”

Izuku blinked, processing. He opened his mouth, using one of his hands to point, then dropped it and looked at his shoes. He laughed, surprising All Might. “Oh my god, you hypocrite,”

“Young Haiyama?”

“I can’t *believe* you!” He said, disbelief morphing into anger. Tears welled in his eyes. “But it’s not exactly like it matters now, right? ‘Cuz I have a quirk and I can use it to be a hero?”

“You’re still proving my statement to be false,” All Might said firmly. “Just because you are able to use your quirk doesn’t mean it doesn’t invalidate my previous opinion. You built your support items without a quirk. You got into UA’s Hero course without using a quirk. It is as you said during the Sports Festival. ‘Quirks aren’t everything and they don’t define the user.’

“I grew up in a time where heroes were still new, where quirks were still going through the change of being something to be fascinated by instead of ostracized for. And, as I grew, I saw many powerful quirks, many powerful people. Eventually, the two images merged. A powerful person has a powerful quirk. It isn’t hard to imagine because the ideal is true in most cases.”

He sighed. “When I received One for All, my dreams could finally come true. I had a powerful quirk, and suddenly I became a powerful person, too. And that power made me narrow-minded.” All Might frowned. “You caught me on a bad day, Young Haiyama, but that is no excuse for my words. My predecessor didn’t choose me to be her successor solely because she knew I could wield One for All, but because of how I would use it. She chose me because of who I was, a teenager with grand ideas and the conviction to see them through.

“It kind of reminds me of you,” he chuckled. “I will be better,” he promised, his expression turned serious once more, regret plain to see. “I cannot take back what I said to you so long ago but I can promise to be a better person than I was.”

Izuku swallowed the emotions clogging his throat. “If a quirkless person were to ask you if they could be a hero now, what would you tell them?”

All Might didn't hesitate. "I would tell them that the journey would be long. More than difficult." He put his bony hand on Izuku's shoulder. "But not impossible. Everyone has the potential to be good and *anyone* can be a hero, no matter the quirk they do or don't possess."

Izuku didn't think hearing it would hit him this hard, but he supposed months of believing your hero does not believe in your dream takes a toll. Izuku broke down into tears, his head dropping forward onto All Might's chest. Long arms wrapped around his torso and Izuku clutched at All Might's suit jacket.

"I must say, this went better than I was expecting." All Might murmured.

Izuku pulled out of their hug and laughed, wiping at his wet face. "Really? How did you think this would go?"

"Not, good," he confessed haltingly. "I wasn't sure of your thoughts about me and maybe you hated me-"

"Don't worry, All Might." He smiled good-naturedly. "I don't hate you."

All Might gave him pause. "Yagi Toshinori," he said, smiling brightly, as if Izuku had given him a great gift. "That's my name. Feel free to use it."

"What did All Might want?" Shouto asked as they slumped against the gym wall. Today their training session had been purely quirkless sparring, so they were the only ones occupying the gym. "You looked like you had been crying when you first arrived."

"He wanted to apologize," Izuku replied. At Shouto's questioning look, he explained. "I had a pretty bad first encounter with him. He told me I couldn't be a hero. I… I realized early on that other people would never believe in me like I wanted them to." Shouto frowned, beginning to refute him, but Izuku stopped him. "I know that's changed. I'm loved now and I have people who care about me."

Shouto tentatively intertwined their hands. "You do," he agreed.

"He already apologized weeks ago," Izuku confessed. "But it's hitting me *now,* and while I had convinced myself not to care-" He cut off,

taking in a shuddering breath.

“It feels good to have validation.” Shouto finished. “When we started training together, I did not want to be friends with you. I merely wanted to find a way to never use my fire. But you were so…” he gestured aimlessly with his free hand. “Every time you said I did something right or complimented me, it felt nice.”

Izuku blushed. “O-Oh,”

“It’s good All Might apologized,” Shouto added, his eyes narrowing. “Or else I would have made him.” Izuku sputtered at the statement but Shouto looked at him earnestly. “You will be a great hero, Izuku. Don’t believe anyone that tells you otherwise. And tell me who they are if it happens, I just want to talk.”

He walked away from the gym with Shouto’s hand clasped around his own, a warm feeling in his chest.

Aizawa took one look at them when they approached, then their hands, and squinted like the universe had just handed him a terrible deck of cards.

“At least he probably dislikes his father as much as I do,” Shouta muttered to console himself before either of them came into earshot.

Chapter End Notes

discord, so you know when i update

The past past can define you (but it doesn't have to)

Chapter Notes

I finally got to add the bakugo & Izuku tag

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Izuku fiddled with his fingers as the rest of his friends sat down. The week had been a combination of non-stop cramming, tinkering, and training. The written exams were over with but he had no idea what they were going to be tested on during the physical portion in Heroics. Obviously, it would be physical and challenging, but what else? Would they be doing individual tests? Would they be paired? Grouped? Would the test be like the entrance exam and test their ability to brute force their way through something or would it be more suited to those with quick minds?

"You'll fry your brain thinking that fast," Kirishima commented, amused.

Izuku jolted out of his stupor and mustered up an uneasy smile. "I'm just nervous about the Heroics exam," he explained. Those at the table made varying noises of empathy. "We don't have a single hint about what it's going to be and it's driving me insane!" If Mei wasn't in the Support labs working on her own project, he might ask her what her opinion on all of the possibilities were but he had a feeling that asking Mei would only serve to make him more worried about his test grade.

Something hard knocked into the back of his head and sent him careening forward. His head smacked into the table lightly and Izuku rubbed the sore spot with a wince.

"Sorry, I guess I couldn't avoid your big head," laughed an airy voice behind him. "The prodigal students of Class 1-A don't know what the exam is going to be?"

Uraraka made a 'shoo' motion with her chopsticks, an irritated expression overcoming the concern that she had faced Izuku with. "Go away, Monoma."

"Why? Is the oh so amazing Surge too far above me to tolerate my presence for even a moment?" He sneered.

Izuku glanced around and noticed his friends bristling, ready to come to his defense, and decided that he should cut this off before they attracted any more attention. Just by calling him “Surge”, eyes had been cast in their direction and Izuku was not willing to be mobbed again.

He was about to stand when a hand came down on the side of Monoma’s neck, effectively incapacitating him. “I’m Kendo Itsuka, Class 1-B’s representative.” The girl introduced herself. “Sorry about that,” she apologized, offering them a smile as she held Monoma’s slumped body up by the scruff of his clothes. She was about to walk away before thinking better of it and facing them again. “By the way, I heard from an upperclassman that they had to fight robots during their exam. The test might have been revamped each year, but that’s what we’re prepping for.”

“Would they really use robots against us for the third time this year?” Izuku asked. “That seems like something we could all get through now without much trouble.”

“Speak for yourself, Mr. Explodo-Glitter Gun,” Hitoshi grumbled, burying his face in his arms. “I failed against those things in the entrance exam. What am I gonna do now? Throw them at a wall with my capture weapon and hope they break?”

Iida cleared his throat. “The metal the smaller robots are composed of is actually incredibly malleable. They break quite easily when opposed with enough force, so, theoretically, you could throw them and it would work.”

Hitoshi lifted his head and stared at Iida for a second before letting his head drop again. “God, I’m going to be sore after this. Lifting anything with those stupid pieces of cloth is so taxing.”

“Guess we should spread the word, huh?” Uraraka groaned, slumping in her chair. “I want to fall into bed and never get up again, not fight robots.”

“There has to be something more to it than that,” Izuku insisted.

Shouto shrugged beside him. “If it is merely robots then I have confidence that ourselves and all of our classmates will pass.”

Izuku allowed himself a moment of reprieve from his pre-test anxiety and leaned into Shouto’s side. Written tests were done with and all they had left to do was probably fight against some robots.

Izuku could handle robots.

They were not facing robots. Not in the slightest.

“Bakugo,” he called. His partner didn’t react, continuing to stalk down the main road. “Bakugo, we need a plan.”

All Might was somewhere inside this faux city, acting the part of a villain for them to either outrun or defeat. Izuku could guess which option Bakugo wanted to take. Izuku flicked Sight on and grimaced at the faint beacon of light shining further down the road. He looked at Bakugo and flinched away from the continuous expanding and contracting of his aura.

When he was unable to control his Sight he had become accustomed to seeing his classmates’ auras and Bakugo’s was by far the most erratic. One moment Izuku could barely see the aura then he would look up and his vision would nearly be consumed by the fiery orange. Like All Might’s blinding light, Izuku hadn’t expected the fluctuation Bakugo presented. He supposed they both had fronts to put up.

Izuku turned off his Sight and caught up with Bakugo. “Can we please communicate with each other? At least tell me what you’re going to do.”

He scoffed and narrowed his eyes. “I’m going to kick All Might’s ass and pass with flying fucking colors.”

Pursing his lips, Izuku held in a sigh. It was, disappointingly enough, exactly what he expected from him. “That’s not a plan, Bakugo. How are we going to fight him? Are we only trying to cuff him or should we push for the gate in case we fail-”

Something cracked in his face when Bakugo’s gauntlet swung at him. He should have seen the blow coming, really. He should have known that there was no communicating with Bakugo because he wasn’t the type to listen to anyone he thought was beneath him. Still, he hadn’t been able to avoid it. Bakugo always seemed to bring out the worst in him, reducing him to something to be spat on, and his body had never unlearned freezing when Bakugo attacked him. Their relationship had been cut off with no hint of closure and it showed.

Bakugo stopped walking to turn and glare down at him. “There is no

we, Deku," he growled. "I'm going to face All Might and win. Alone."

This was just like middle school. Izuku, hurt and alone. Bakugo, arrogant and prideful.

His stomach dropped, an empty feeling gnawing at his insides, hollowing him out as he stood to face Bakugo's retreating form as he stomped down the street.

They hadn't changed anything between them.

Not again, a voice deep inside him howled.

Never again.

Izuku stood, the bones in the side of his face throbbing. "Did you really forget what my quirk does?" Bakugo froze. "We could win so *easily* if you would just work with me." Izuku knew it was a long shot. But Bakugo *had* changed because of UA. He was not who he used to be and Izuku was banking on that change, however miniscule.

He turned to face him again and Izuku dared to hope.

He should have known better, evidently.

Izuku diverted his attack this time, avoiding another explosion to the face. "It's not like you won't get a fight," Izuku tried to reason, only to dodge another swing. "Come on, don't you want to win?"

Bakugo snarled. "That's not a *win,* Deku." The poison in his voice threatened to strangle his lungs, attempting to steal any semblance of calm and replace it with anxiety. *Deku,* because he thought Izuku was below him. *Deku,* because he thought Izuku was weak.

Deku, because Izuku was useless to him.

"Why isn't it?" Izuku argued, rage welling inside the hollow pit in his stomach. "Why won't you work with me?"

"If I have to get help from a shitty weakling like you," he started, stepping closer with menacing sincerity. "I would rather lose."

Izuku listened to their fight from a nearby alcove and wondered if he should run. All Might was distracted with Bakugo and he could

probably make it to the gate without being caught if he was stealthy enough. He laughed quietly at the thought of Bakugo's face if he did that. If Izuku stole his fight.

It was tempting.

But Izuku wanted to beat All Might with his quirk. He could do it. All he had to do was touch him and it was over.

First, though, Izuku either needed to get Bakugo out of the way or onto his side.

Izuku unholstered his gun, checking the ammunition. His gun was now a multi-faceted multi-pen that he could choose his ammunition with instead of shooting and hoping that it fired the desired pellet. There was a sort of revolver system that allowed him to switch between types of ammunition with a flick of his finger.

Looking down at his costume, Izuku realized he should probably modify it to match his advancements with his quirk. Tearing away the sleeves, Izuku figured that if All Might had fewer places to grab him, he might last longer in a drawn-out fight.

The fight was taking a turn for the worst, Bakugo being thrown into the side of a building. Bakugo's arms strained to push him back onto his shaky legs, his lip curled in a snarl. Vomit clung to the skin around his mouth.

Izuku aimed his gun, Stick in the chamber. The pin in Bakugo's gauntlet dropped to the ground and Izuku fired at the back of All Might's feet, the sounds melding together. Propelling himself through the air, Izuku fought against the wave the explosion caused and latched onto All Might's back, slapping his hand onto the back of his neck and gritting his teeth against the feeling of burns biting their way up his shins, which were hooked around All Might's chest.

"Deku," Bakugo growled somewhere in front of him.

Izuku scowled at the bright colors of All Might's costume and growled back. "Fucking *cuff him-"*

"I told you I don't want your fucking help!"

"I don't *care,* Bakugo." Izuku snarled, wishing he could say it to his face. "Cuff. Him."

“No,” he said after a brief silence.

Izuku nearly fell off of All Might’s back. “The hell do you mean *no?”*

“I told you, Deku. If I need your shitty help beating him, I would rather fucking lose.” Broken pieces of the pavement crunched under Bakugo’s feet as he stepped forward. “Let go and let me fucking finish him.”

A laugh of disbelief bubbled in his throat, breaking from his mouth with a terrible amount of mania. “You think you’ve got him on the ropes? Is that it? Cuz I *promise* you, Bakugo, you won’t win against him head-on. If he could be beaten by a child, he wouldn’t be Number One-”

Explosions against his shins ripped a scream from his throat, the tense grip he kept on All Might broken as he fell to the ground. Agony muddled his thoughts, his throat constricting and disallowing his attempts to breathe.

The world tilted and shook as Izuku struggled to his feet. The skin of his shins pulsed with pain but the sensation was distant. All Might was fighting Bakugo again but each explosion was muffled, each crash was faint. Izuku turned, ignoring each excruciating tremble of his legs as his shoes shot him down the street.

“For the one who wants to run!”

Something crashed against his back, slamming him into the ground-

Izuku wasn’t conscious to feel his head smack into the road.

“Oi, wake your ass up.”

Pain lanced through his nerves, uneven breaths becoming worse as awareness sank in. “Kacchan?” he asked, ears barely picking up the hitching of someone’s breath. Izuku blinked at the world around them, concrete and narrow, before closing his eyes. “Why’re we in an alley?”

“I failed,” he said, ignoring Izuku’s question. “There can’t be more than two minutes left and I can’t beat him.”

He failed? No, Kacchan always-

“Well, we were supposed to be partners, Bakugo,” Izuku replied bitterly. He eyed Bakugo, slumped against the wall across from him. “And we had him-”

“No, *you* had him!” Bakugo snapped. “I was getting fucking nowhere but you-”

“It could have been *us!”* Izuku snarled, tears of pain and rancor blurring his vision. “But you wouldn’t work with me. God, you actively worked *against* me. If you had just-”

“I wanted to win.”

Izuku scoffed shakily. “So did I.”

Bakugo sneered. “But you could have done it without me, right? You had him and he couldn’t fight his way out, so what was I, huh? Some extra?”

“What? No, Bakugo-”

“You’ve been looking down on me this entire year, Deku. Hell, our entire lives,” he snarled. “You hid your fucked up quirk and you blew past me in the entrance exam. The Sports Festival, your weird notes getting attention, all the fucking Surge nonsense, now *this.* Guess you really wanted to prove your fucking worth.”

Irritation overrode the numbing pain in his legs for a few brief moments. “You are so arrogant,” he whispered, staring into Bakugo’s eyes. “I didn’t do any of that because of you. My accomplishments, my choices are not made with you in mind. And I certainly don’t have anything to prove to you or anyone else.”

A gust of wind swept through the alley, brushing over his legs and Izuku choked back a scream. He tried not to squirm too much, tried not to open his eyes and look down at his mutilated flesh. Instead, he opened his eyes and stared up, counting the cracks in the wall until the pain faded.

“Everything is so fucking different here,” Bakugo muttered. “I don’t get it.”

“That’s because we both got screwed over by the school system,” he said hoarsely. Bakugo’s answering glare had more questions than fury, so he plowed on. “You grew up thinking the world revolved around you and that your actions didn't have consequences. I received the

opposite treatment."

The buzzer rang, stating their failure, but neither of them cared much at this point.

"I know my actions have consequences, shitty-"

"Then why would you do this?" Izuku gestured at his legs. "Because I've read the rules and bylaws and shit, this is grounds for expulsion."

Bakugo stiffened. "You wouldn't dare-"

"And if I did?" Izuku asked, meeting his scowl head-on. "If I or my guardians decided to take this and go to the principal, you couldn't do anything."

Bakugo stared at him silently, the realization setting in.

"While we're at it," Izuku drawled. "Why did you fight everyone who didn't agree with you?"

"They were looking down on me," he growled. "They thought they knew better than me."

"Even if they had been, that doesn't give you the right to hurt them."

"I still got into UA," Bakugo said. "I proved I am better than those extras."

Izuku hummed. "When we leave, you should ask to see our school records side by side."

"Why the hell would I do that?"

"So you can see just how much help you had from our teachers."

He stiffened, rage igniting. "Fuck you, I got in. I won."

"Winning doesn't make you better," Izuku said. "Just like how losing doesn't make you weak."

"All Might's never lost a damn battle, and he's the best-"

"You've never lost, but what did that turn you into?" Izuku asked. "You never got in trouble for bullying the other kids. You think it's okay to hurt people who get in your way. What does that make you?"

Like a cornered animal, he lashed out, grabbing Izuku by the collar of his costume. “I always win, Deku. That’s why I’ll be the best hero.”

“No.” Izuku grit his teeth against the pain of his legs being jostled. “Heroes save, too, Bakugo. They win to *save* people. Heroes are supposed to make people feel safe.”

Izuku stared into his burning gaze unflinchingly. “The last time I felt safe around you, we were toddlers.”

The statement seemed to strike a chord. “Heroes *win,”* he hissed. “Villains lose, that’s how it works.”

“And that’s the only reason you want to be a hero? To win?” Izuku questioned. “You could win at a lot of things, Bakugo, so why be a hero?”

“What the fuck else would I be?” he snarled. “My quirk is perfect for it.”

“There,” Izuku said. “Your quirk. Your entire reason for being the ‘best’ during our school days was because of your powerful, heroic quirk. If you abandoned that, what would you be left with?”

He scoffed. “I could have done all that shit without my quirk,” he argued.

“Yeah,” Izuku agreed. “But the teachers would have reprimanded you instead of letting you traipse around like you were the king. Every fight would have been written onto your record if you had anything besides the ‘perfect’ quirk.”

“Shut up,” Bakugo ordered.

“You hurt me for *fun,”* Izuku bit out. “You told me to kill myself because I annoyed you. Tell me, Bakugo, what does that make you?”

“Shut. Up.” The grip on his hero suit began to tremble.

“You remind me of Endeavor,” Bakugo flinched. “All he wants is to win, too. He wants the Number One spot, just like you. He’s got such tunnel vision that he couldn’t even recognize that he was hurting people to get what he wanted.”

“Deku,”

“Or maybe he did know. Maybe he knew and he simply didn’t care,

because nothing could get in the way of his victory.”

“I am not-” He cut himself off. “I am not fucking like him.”

“You’re not,” Izuku conceded. “You’re fifteen. You haven’t hurt anyone in the name of heroism.”

“I hurt you,” he argued through gritted teeth.

Izuku laughed weakly. “At least you feel bad this time.”

“And what, that’s enough for you?”

“Not nearly,” Izuku said quietly. “But I can’t force you to be a better person. Only you can do that.” He felt cold. His breathing was shallow, he couldn’t feel the pain anymore. Exhaustion crawled from his limbs and into his brain.

“And if I don’t?”

A tall shadow loomed over them, a figure in a dark jumpsuit standing over them. “Then you can say goodbye to your hero career, Bakugo.”

Izuku looked at his dad through hooded eyes. “Hey, Dadzawa.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for kudos/comments!

These golden ashes turn to dirt

Chapter Notes

Bakugo Katsuki/Consequences

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shouta entered the teacher's lounge and flopped face-first into the couch. Todoroki and Yaoyorozu had passed, hopefully the other hellions would, too. Most of them should be done by now. He glanced around the lounge, finding a few of his colleagues in similar positions across the furniture. All Might was notably absent.

His decision to pair Izuku and Bakugo had been at Nedzu's behest. Supposedly, the principal left the decision up to him but there had been too much buttering up and the implied wish for the two of them to be partners for Shouta to really call the decision his own. Izuku and Hitoshi had been harder to pair because they were not allowed from facing off against himself Hizashi, and Nemuri, in Hitoshi's case.

The match-up between Izuku and Bakugo could, theoretically, go spectacularly. On paper, they were excellent students who worked hard and complemented each other. Bakugo was brute force with a good measure of brains and Izuku's tenacity and quick thinking matched Bakugo's. Their quirks, each powerful in their own right, gave them a fighting chance. Izuku's was one of the few quirks in the class that could stop a hero as powerful as All Might in his tracks. Bakugo could pave the path to that victory if he found it in himself to work with Izuku.

But therein lies the problem. Their relationship, their past, was messy. Shouta had no idea how long they had known each other, their records only showed that they went to the same middle school, but he knew that they had bad blood. Their inability to work alongside each other hampered them in exercises. It hampered their *teammates*. Shouta could see the opportunity for the growth Nedzu wanted, he just didn't want it to come at the expense of Izuku's well-being.

Because Bakugo was the problem. Sure, Izuku would retort and punch back if Bakugo started something, but Bakugo never made an attempt to work with him. Izuku tried to remain civil where Bakugo chose to pick a fight.

Uraraka was undoubtedly a positive influence on him, their work together was efficient and brutal, but the fact of the matter was that Bakugo held no respect for several of his classmates' opinions if their ideas went against what he wanted to do.

Shouta glanced at the clock and sighed. He should check on them. Their exam was due to end in about five minutes so they were either finished or fighting with the last dregs of their energy. Bakugo and Izuku's exam area was the closest to the main building by far, so he could make it there in no time.

He arrived in the observation room and immediately knew something was wrong. Those of his students who were present had a dark aura around them, conflicted expressions on some and enraged ones on others. His eyes flicked to where Shuzenji flicked the keys on the control board, switching from camera to camera.

Bakugo and Izuku were nowhere in sight.

Shouta put down the headphones, the video before him at its end.

"You told me to kill myself because I annoyed you."

He stood, stalking away from the computer, and balled his hands into fists.

"The last time I felt safe around you, we were toddlers."

Izuku had light scarring where Bakugo used explosions against his shins. Uraraka had punched Bakugo when he walked back into the main building. Shouta suspected the rest of his students present in the observation room weren't that far behind her. Iida hadn't stopped Uraraka, nor had he reprimanded her for the physical aggression.

Shouta couldn't blame him. A broken nose seemed so insignificant compared to all the shit Bakugo pulled during the exam.

"You hurt me for fun,"

He blinked and pain bloomed from his knuckles. His fist pulled away from the wall, the rage and *guilt* inside of him uncowed by his actions.

If Shouta could manage it, Bakugo would never get within a mile of Izuku ever again. It wouldn't be that hard. Shouta could expel him and bar him from UA campus.

"You're fifteen."

So are you, Shouta wanted to scream.

Izuku drifted awake gradually, the dull pain ebbing at his senses dragging him painstakingly back into reality. Jolting in place, the pain sharpened into a familiar need to scratch at the itch under his skin. Burns, he realized. It had been a long time since they ate so deeply into his flesh but not so long that he was capable of forgetting the pricks that came with shifting, the constant pain.

Disappointment weighed him down more than the heavy bandages on his legs. They failed. Izuku wasn't going to the summer training camp.

Aggravation washed over him in a terrible wave. Why hadn't he just taken the damn win? Izuku gave him the perfect opportunity and he scoffed at it.

"Izuku?"

He blinked against the lights in the room and smiled up at Hitoshi's blurry form. "Hey, Toshi."

Hitoshi swiped his thumb across Izuku's face. "You're crying," he noted, the muscles in his jaw flickering.

"I just-" Izuku heaved in a choked breath. "I thought he would at least give me a *chance.* Now, we failed and I can't go with you and Dadzawa to the summer camp and I'm injured again-"

"That's *his* fault," Hitoshi snapped, his violet eyes burning with resentment. "Bakugo did this to you and he'll get what's coming to him."

Get what's…? "Toshi, what-"

"Remember when that asshole hurt you earlier in the year because he thought you were quirkless? It's like that." He explained. "He attacked you without provocation *twice,* and made bad calls throughout the rest

of the exam."

"If they expel him nothing will get better." The words came out with clarity, with the bitter knowledge that they were true. Bakugo built a habit of making life difficult for Izuku, it's not like he would stop now. "He won't learn anything."

"Izuku, that's not the point." Hitoshi practically growled. "He hurt you-"

"He's been hurting me for years and up until now, no one did shit," Izuku bit back the frustration begging to raise his voice. " *That's* the point. All his life he's been told that he was the best, that he was going to be a hero, no matter what he did. Bakugo is a product of the system, and nothing will change inside him if UA just kicks him out because he couldn't unlearn years of neglect in a semester."

"That doesn't make what he did okay," Hitoshi said with distaste.

"No," Izuku agreed quietly. "It doesn't, and I'll probably cry more later but I need you to go tell Dadzawa that he can't expel Bakugo."

Though Izuku would never say this to Bakugo's face, he didn't believe Explosion was a great quirk for heroics. Like Endeavor's, the quirk was powerful but destructive. The powerful part is what people always got hooked on. Bakugo had power, so he would be a great hero. Flashy power that he could flaunt and use whenever he wanted to amaze and intimidate.

Bakugo's personality was what made it possible for him to become a hero. Not the aggression or superiority complex, but the determination. Bakugo had always been sharp, the head on his shoulders made for thinking of ways to get better. His strive to be the best was what allowed him to use his quirk in such a versatile manner.

Izuku knew Bakugo could be great; that's what made his actions so frustrating. That's what made Izuku admire him for years despite Bakugo's poor treatment of him.

"I'm not speaking in that asshole's favor," Hitoshi grumbled.

Izuku pushed himself onto his forearms. "Then take me to Dadzawa and I'll talk."

Hitoshi raised an eyebrow at him, glancing at his bandaged legs. "I don't know if I'm allowed to do that."

Izuku raised both eyebrows at him, an *oh really* sort of expression on his face. “Okay, okay.” He sucked on his teeth. “Not like I haven’t broken rules before,” he shrugged before hauling his legs off the bed.

“Izuku-”

Izuku hobbled past Hitoshi without a backward glance.

Two files smacked onto the desk in front of him, his teacher’s gaze holding a deadly sort of calm. “Do you know what these are?” he asked, his voice holding no evidence of the rage he witnessed when Aizawa leaped into the alley to take them back to the school. Instead, he observed Katsuki, waiting for the slightest hint of weakness before he struck.

Without waiting for an answer, Aizawa flipped open one of them. “These are the files of Haiyama Izuku, formerly Midoriya Izuku, and Bakugo Katsuki.”

Their files? Deku’s voice wormed into his brain, telling him to look. He started reaching out for the closest one, but stopped, glancing up at Aizawa for permission. He pushed both of the files closer and sat in his chair, waiting.

Katsuki nabbed the closest one off the edge of the desk, reading his own name and trailing down the page past all the things he already knew. Quirk, age, grades, blah blah- *there.* Teacher notes.

“The fuck is this?” he spat, scowling at the glowing praises calling him a delight to have in the classroom. They made seem him like fucking Four-Eyes! Katsuki knew what he was like, the kinds of habits he had to curb once he arrived at UA. He couldn’t randomly explode things anymore during class. No yelling or blatantly insulting his classmates. If he used his quirk during class at all, he was met with a warning, not an appraisal, and a gentle voice telling him to quiet down.

He reached the end, almost snarling at the honey-sweet way they praised him, lying through their goddamn teeth for his sake.

“We both got screwed over by the school system,”

Katsuki grabbed Deku’s file.

He nearly tore it apart by the time he finished reading it.

They called Deku a liar, a cheat. An attention hog who was jealous of his classmates' powers and tried to blame fights on them. The file said that quirkless, pitiful Deku targeted their star student because he couldn't stand how much *better* he was.

All this time, he had prided himself on getting into UA. On leaving his shitty middle school and those ass-kissing extras behind. But those ass-kissing extras were apparently the only fucking reason his file hadn't been red-flagged. Katsuki knew any other kid would have been given detention. Anyone else would have been suspended for some of the shit things he pulled during class and with the other students.

"Your entire reason for being the 'best' during our school days was because of your powerful, heroic quirk. If you abandoned that, what would you be left with?"

"Give me one valid reason why I shouldn't expel you right now."

Katsuki's head snapped up. "What?" he croaked, though he heard those damning words perfectly clear.

"One reason, Bakugo, and I won't expel you." Aizawa narrowed his eyes, the first sign of emotion he allowed himself since their meeting began. "Throughout the year, you have been a decent student. But, like Mineta, your academic prowess doesn't take away from your less favorable qualities. So, one reason, Bakugo. Just one, and maybe I'll consider not barring you from the Hero course."

What? Bar him from the Hero course?

His confusion must have shown on his face because Aizawa took it upon himself to explain further. "You have potential, Bakugo, but it's dropping fast. During the exam, you attacked your partner when he attempted to work with you, you charged into a fight with the Number One hero half-cocked like you expected to win, and when your partner presented you with the chance to cuff the villain and achieve your goal, you proceeded to injure him. *Again.* Only once you were truly beaten down did you think to take your partner and run. In a real situation, with a *real* villain, you would have killed him and yourself.

"On top of all of this, you admitted to purposefully harming another student for personal entertainment in the past. You admitted to suicide baiting and bullying. This school has zero-tolerance for

bullying, Bakugo. The Hero course is for those with heroic potential. I don't see why I should continue to keep you in my class, let alone this school."

"Can you even make that fucking decision?" Bakugo glared, his haunches rising with familiar rancor. "Isn't this nepotism or some shit since he's- fuck, what is he, your son?"

Aizawa's eyes took on a new gleam, glowing a menacing vermillion. His hair hovered above his shoulders as he stepped as close as the desk between them would allow. "I am not incapable of being impartial, Bakugo. And you should be informed that any expulsions I issue are accepted by Principal Nedzu before the student is no longer UA's problem. So, yes, I can make this decision. But, I will ask that the reason you give me is a good one, because, as you said, I am a parent,

"And you have hurt my child."

Aizawa pinned him with a glare that threatened to burn right through his head. "I'll ask one more time. Why should I not expel you?"

Katsuki opened his mouth slowly, unable to break eye contact and unknowing of what would come out of his mouth. What could save him? What could save the future he had been dreaming of all his life? The future that everyone promised him he would have?

The door burst open, yelling filtering through his staticky senses.

"Dadzawa!" Deku shouted, trying to pry Dead-Eye's arms off of his torso as he struggled to keep Deku off of his obviously bandaged legs. "Don't expel him!"

Hitoshi could say, with zero hesitation, that Bakugo Katsuki was a grade-A asshole. He was everything Hitoshi despised, growing up. A kid with a perfect hero's quirk who got everything handed to him on a silver platter because he was born with a lucky gene. He was arrogant and dismissive and Hitoshi was fully on board if Dad planned to expel him.

Izuku, on the other hand, who fucking agreed that Bakugo was a terrible person, was somehow *not* on board with the plan.

"Don't expel him!" Izuku pleaded as the door to the conference room

door swung open, nearly elbowing him in the face as he flailed in Hitoshi's grip.

Dad's quirk powered down, his threatening aura dampening in their presence. "Shouldn't you be in bed?"

"Yes," Hitoshi answered through gritted teeth. Izuku was as heavy as a baby elephant and his arms, strong as they may be, could only hold a squirming, muscle-dense baby for so long. He refused to let Izuku walk on his healing legs though, and Recovery Girl hadn't been there to tell them where she kept the wheelchairs, so here they were.

Hitoshi shuffled over to the chair beside Bakugo's and dropped Izuku into it as gently as he could. "Sorry, he would have come down here on his own no matter what I said."

He noted, with no small amount of satisfaction, that Bakugo's face was still bruised from Uraraka's punch even after he went to Recovery Girl.

Dad surveyed Izuku quietly. Deeming him healthy enough to partake in the conversation, he asked, "Why shouldn't I expel him?"

"For starters, he won't learn how to be better if you just kick him out," Izuku stated, leaning forward on the arms of his chair.

Dad turned to stare at Bakugo. "We have been teaching him about heroics this entire semester," he said, ire seeping into his tone. "Yet he seems to have not retained any of it. He has had plenty of time to see what kind of traits we value. He put his pride above your well-being and assaulted you twice over the course of the exam."

"You once told me that I couldn't expect myself to learn a new way of thinking right away. You said that my expectations had been set, and years of experience told me that I was right to have such a low bar for how I was treated. Well, it's the same with him, isn't it? He's not used to people telling him he isn't hot shit because he can make sparks in his hands. We were both screwed over by the adults in our lives, so please give him another chance!"

Bakugo was staring at Izuku like he was actually seeing him for the first time. Good, he can finally pull his head out of his ass and be grateful to this altruistic fluffball that's saving his whole damn career.

"I should expel him," Dad said plainly. Bakugo flinched. "His actions are well within my usual criteria for expulsion and I have seen zero

efforts on Bakugo's part to better himself over the course of this semester. So, Bakugo, what are your thoughts on Izuku's words? Anything to add?"

Dig your own grave, is what Dad was really telling him to do.

"I- How would- Fuck. How would I-" he paused, gritting his teeth. "How would I learn to be a better fucking person?"

Dad, for his part, seemed disgruntled by the fact that he couldn't simply kick Bakugo out right then. "UA has programs in place, and counselors are employed for the specific reason of helping students."

"So, what? I go see a damn shrink and let 'em poke my brain for a while before you say I'm good?"

Dad sighed. "No, Bakugo, because counselors and therapy don't involve someone poking at your head. It involves vulnerability and self-awareness. It involves allowing yourself to realize things about yourself you may not want to know."

"That it?" He grumbled, arms crossed and face downcast.

"If you want to stay in the Hero course, Bakugo, mandatory therapy and anger management won't be all you are required to do," Dad deadpanned, plowing on despite Bakugo bristling. "If you stay, you will be restricted to paper assignments, you've proven yourself untrustworthy during practicals. While your classmates are challenging themselves in Hero class activities, you will be writing an essay pertaining to your teacher's chosen topic."

Bakugo looked ready to murder someone, not good, considering Dad was still on the fence about keeping him. "I can't do any fucking hero work in the Hero course? What would be the damn point-"

"If you would rather be moved to the General Education department, I could have that arranged," Dad threatened. Bakugo's mouth clicked shut, his hands curled into fists on his thighs. "You have proven yourself a danger to your teammate, whoever that may be, yourself, and the grade you would share. If you stay, you will take remedial lessons on the foundations of heroics. If you stay, you will attend detentions with your teachers."

Dad was acutely aware of how close Bakugo was to lashing out. Still, he pushed. "If you stay, you will be moved to Class 1-B, trading places with another student. If you stay, you will not interact with Haiyama

Izuku unless he instigates the interaction. You will not call him 'Deku' or any other derogatory name." He stopped, not breaking Bakugo's gaze. "If you stay, you will be damn sure not to make the same mistake again when the time comes. If you are cleared for Hero assignments again, you will not put one foot out of line. Because if you do, you will not get another chance, Bakugo. Any objections?"

"Class B?" he inquired through gritted teeth.

"The hostility you displayed towards Izuku throughout the year has culminated in this. You are incapable of working with him or around him without an outburst. In Class 1-B, you would rarely have to interact with him at all." Dad turned back to Izuku. "And need I remind both of you that this is all hypothetical. You will still have to convince the rest of the family not to go after him, Izuku. I am still deciding whether or not you can be turned into an asset, Bakugo."

Dad tidied up the papers on his desk, sitting down in his chair. "When I have my answer, I will call a more formal meeting with both of your parents, who will then veto or accept the terms." He looked up at all of them. "Bakugo, go home. Hitoshi, take Izuku back to the infirmary."

"I can't believe the *nerve* of that brat!" Mitsu growled, pacing by Izuku's bed. "Shouta better expel his ass, I swear-"

"Mom, please just listen-"

She whirled on him, pointing a finger in his face. "Nuh-uh, don't try to butter me up by calling me 'mom', mister. He hurt you, Izuku. Apparently, he's been aggressive towards you since before we even knew you. He's gotta learn that his actions have consequences."

Izuku batted his eyes at her, the picture of innocence. *"Please,* Mom?"

Mitsu put her face in her hands, making a long-suffering sound. "Yumi, save me, he's too cute."

Ayumi put a gentle hand over his bandages, meeting his eyes. She moved closer to him, sitting on the bed. *"You are hurt again, Izuku."* She said solemnly. *"Why should we not want to hurt him back this way? We can only protect you if you allow us to."*

“But he can be better, Mama, I know it.”

Ayumi cupped his face and he leaned into the contact, relishing in it. She leaned his forehead against her own and sighed. Her gills rumbled, producing an almost purr-like sound. She pulled away. *“You are too kind for your own good.”*

“You can say that again,” Mitsu muttered, pulling Izuku into a one-armed hug.

Shouta tapped his fingers against the two files open on his desk, the knock of his finger against the wood of his desk the only sound in the conference room.

“Aldera, huh?”

Shouta picked up his phone, dialling Nedzu.

Chapter End Notes

discord, so you know when i update

Thank you for kudos/comments!

title is a lyric from play with fire

So, so small

Chapter Notes

mind the new tags

warning for implied/referenced human experimentation. nothing gorey or in detail but it's there

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Toshinori dried his hands with the small washcloth hanging off of his oven's handle. With the dishes done, he had completed his chores for the day. He sighed and leaned onto the counter, the surface cold against his forearms. Lethargy plagued him, echoes of his own voice haunting him. Truthfully, Haiyama's quirk had only repeated thoughts his own mind conjured years ago. Toshinori was always critical of himself and it tended to manifest in self-deprecation. Haiyama's quirk made them feel fresh again, though. Like slicing through an old scar.

He tried not to think about the grotesque form his body took in the void of Haiyama's quirk. How that distorted reflection of himself spoke with a rasping voice bloody lips. How his mutilated body had taken the form of All Might, towering over his gaunt, sickly body.

Unable to close his eyes without seeing his own smile, teeth stained red with blood, and his shadowed eyes, he wondered if this was how Mirai felt when he insisted he retire.

Izuku swished the coffee in his mug, watching the dark liquid move. Smoothie flicked her tail at his feet resting on the coffee table and he batted it away. "Stop that," he whispered, shooing her. "I'm trying to mope and you're ruining my wallowing."

She ignored him, wiggling on the coffee table before launching herself onto the front of his shoulder and clawing her way onto the top of his shoulders. He huffed at the blatant disregard for his wishes, but she settled nicely around his neck. Mac slinked into the living room and hopped onto the cushion beside him. Izuku put down his mug and rhythmically pet both of them.

Izuku wondered where the summer training camp would be held. Would his classmates come back and be miles ahead of him? He wondered what he and the other failed kids would be doing while their classmates were out training.

Fuck, this was exactly what he had been trying to avoid.

“Thanks for distracting me,” Izuku said softly, tears building in his eyes. His hands stalled, losing energy. “But I told Hitoshi I’d cry about it later, right?”

Damnit, he didn’t want to be left behind! Stupid Bakugo and his stupid pride. Stupid Izuku for thinking he would ever be able to work with him and not get hurt. He should have waited them out, or stopped Bakugo, or found another way to win, but he *didn’t* , and now he was going to miss out-

“Izuku?” He blinked and saw Yamada kneeling in front of him. “What’s wrong, little listener?”

“Failed the test,” Izuku sniffled, raising a hand to rub the moisture from his eyes. “I can’t go to the training camp.”

Yamada’s face twisted with confusion. “What do you mean? ‘Course you’re going.” He smiled teasingly. “Then I’ll have the house all to myself, no insomniacs wandering the house at odd hours.”

He shook his head. “Dadzawa said that anyone who failed wouldn’t be allowed to go to the training camp.”

He sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose, and stood up. Before Izuku could ask what he did wrong, Yamada strode out of the room, muttering things under his breath in frustration. Not a minute later, he marched back in, pushing Aizawa towards him, who looked like he was still half-asleep.

“Go on,” Yamada said scoldingly. “Tell him.”

Aizawa let himself fall back onto the couch with a *fwump* and turned toward Izuku. “I lied,” he confessed. “It was a logical ruse. You’re all going to the training camp.”

“What?” Izuku asked loudly. He glanced at Yamada, who nodded, still giving his husband the stink eye. “R-Really?”

Aizawa nodded, looking somewhat apologetic underneath his sleepy

expression. “Yes.”

Izuku groaned. “You’re terrible, Dadzawa. Just terrible.” Aizawa smiled toothily. Izuku glared in response.

“And you shouldn’t be worrying anyway,” Aizawa commented. “You didn’t fail the test.”

Izuku turned to him with a puzzled frown. “Bakugo and I didn’t escape or capture the villain. We didn’t meet the requirements-”

“True,” he conceded. “But your teammate actively sabotaged you both during the exam, We won’t fault you for that.”

In group projects before UA, the opposite usually happened. He would be lumped into a group with people who wanted nothing to do with him, had the work dumped on him, and then when the time came to turn it in, his partners told the teacher that he didn’t do anything. The teachers knew what his handwriting looked like. The teachers knew that he had done the work. It was just an excuse to be rude to him, to demean him, but they jumped on it. He failed, they passed. Life went on because that kind of treatment was normal.

Not now, though. Not here, where people thought he was worth something.

Izuku cried a little more after that.

Shouta stared at the pictures on the wall. Pictures of successful graduates were proudly displayed in their main office. One picture was hung with obvious esteem above the rest.

Bakugo Katsuki’s unsmiling yearbook picture glared at him through the gleaming frame of glass. Izuku’s picture was nowhere to be seen, as if he didn’t achieve the exact same accomplishment. He was here because of negligence but seeing it in person only fanned the burning anger in his gut.

“Mr. Aizawa!” A man entered the room, his expression glowing with delight. He introduced himself as Principal Nishida. His smile noticeably broadened when he saw Shouta staring at their pictures. He rambled about Bakugo the entire way to a meeting room. He praised Bakugo and called him an extraordinarily gifted child. Shouta rolled

his eyes behind the man's back. He taught Bakugo and that was certainly one way how he would describe him.

"But you're here for some reason, yes?" the man asked, finally catching himself. "Your email never said what exactly-"

"You had another student enroll in UA, didn't you?"

A switch flipped, the smile sliding off his face. "Ah," he said shortly, lip twitching downwards with distaste. "Midoriya. I suppose I forgot about him."

"Haiyama," he corrected. "He placed first in the exams," Shouta commented dryly.

Nishida hummed with complete disinterest. "Yes, we were all rather surprised by that, especially when no one disputed it. I even sent an email to your principal with my concerns,"

An email? Shouta resisted the urge to glare. Nedzu never mentioned any damn email. He could have used it to bury him further.

"Why would someone dispute his placement?"

Nishida gave him a sympathetic look. "Well, I'm sure you've noticed his affinity for creating gadgets. He was always messing with something when he had time and, frankly, we were worried he had somehow falsified his score."

"Do you think so little of our system that you believe a child could manipulate the results?" Shouta questioned, watching Nishida's face pale.

"No! No, I'm so sorry," he rushed to say. "It's just that while Midoriya has always expressed his desire to be a hero, everyone knew that he was chasing something unattainable. His behavior isn't exactly the kind you would see in a hero."

"Behavior?" Shouta says through gritted teeth.

"Oh, Midoriya was always distracting his peers, seeking attention, sometimes he would go as far as to get physical with some of our other students." He huffed, like the concept was amusing. "He's quirkless, you know, so he was always jealous of the other kids. I'm surprised he could keep himself from being expelled for so long. He just refuses to face reality, but I'm sure a teacher like you will set him

straight."

Whatever semblance of restraint Shouta exercised during this conversation shattered. *"Set him straight?* Haiyama is one of my best students, in academics and physically. He is kind, intelligent, and fair. His lack of a quirk should never have biased your teaching."

Nishida opened his mouth and Shouta glared with his quirk.

"Moreover, Bakugo is not cooperative, or tempered, or anywhere near a "perfect student". His ego is ten times too large and he has proven himself to be a danger to himself and his classmates because he couldn't swallow his pride. You have set him back by allowing him to act as his quirk makes him immune to punishment and encouraging him to act as though other people are below him."

"Bakugo-"

"Setting Bakugo back does not equate to how you have unequivocally failed Haiyama," Shouta all but growled. "Did you never try to call his parents? After all the things you say he did, wouldn't you contact his guardians? Or were you negligent to the point of knowingly leaving a child to raise himself?"

"If he was actually in trouble, he should have told us!" Nishida argued shrilly, red in the face.

"Would you have listened?" Shouta stepped forward, snarling. "Would you have even given him the time of day? You called him quirkless like he was afflicted with a disease you didn't want to catch. You have lied to me about his character and belittled him. When he was your student you denied him all the things a teacher should offer their students, so why the hell would he think he could trust you?"

"Midoriya never gave us any indication that something was wrong-"

"It's your job to see the indicators," Shouta said icily. "It was your job to take care of him. Of both of them, and instead, you allowed bad habits to fester and fostered their toxic mindsets."

"It's not like he has any real potential! Midoriya-"

"His name is Haiyama and he has more potential to be a hero than half the hero hopefuls out there."

Backing away from Nishida, who stared at him with wide, stunned

eyes, Shouta turned his quirk off. “Expect an email from UA and a more thorough investigation on how the staff treats the students. Neglecting to find out a child has been abandoned under your nose is quite telling, though, don’t you think?”

He left and Nishida did not try to stop him.

“The pool?” Izuku asked warily. The last day of school was finally here and he and his friends were all sitting together. Uraraka and Iida sat down and mentioned how fun going to the pool was going to be.

Uraraka nodded vigorously. “Kaminari suggested it so now the whole class is going to meet up! I don’t know if you have time or even like going to pools, but I think it’ll be fun.”

Izuku glanced at Hitoshi and rubbed his arms self-consciously. “I-I don't have a swimsuit,” he told her, heat rising to his face. “I also don’t know how to swim.”

“Neither do I,” Shouto chimed in, unembarrassed as he slurped his soba.

“That’s fine, kero,” Tsuyu said. “I’ll teach you if you want to learn.”

“Just ask one of your parents to get you a swimsuit,” Hitoshi said, picking at his rice. “You do have *four* of them.”

“But-” Even after all months had passed, Izuku hated asking his guardians to buy anything for him. “How much do swimsuits cost?”

Hitoshi gave him a dry look but Uraraka gave him a range and where he could find decent but cheap swimwear.

The day ended and Hitoshi poked him as they walked out. “They would buy anything you wanted, you know. We aren’t hurting for cash.”

Izuku felt himself turning red. “I know that, but, well, they shouldn’t spend too much on me-”

“When have you ever asked them to buy you something that wasn’t something essential? You built your own headphones and your own phone and only replaced them when it was absolutely necessary.

Plus," Hitoshi added. "I haven't gone swimming in a while. I might need a new swimsuit, too."

Turns out, they didn't need to buy swimsuits at all. They asked Yamada when they all piled into the car and he told them that they have swimsuits from UA. As in, the swimsuit was like the uniform and gym clothes; both of which Izuku bought with his own money.

Izuku turned to Hitoshi smugly. "Looks like no one needs to spend anything."

Hitoshi glanced at him, then shoved him away.

The only thing that worried him was whether the swimsuits would have a top or not. His scars were sensitive to sunlight going to the pool meant prolonged exposure. Yamada alleviated his worries again, telling him that UA did provide long-sleeved tops.

Izuku relaxed against his seat, allowing himself to feel excited about going to the pool for the first time.

(Hizashi glanced at his husband meaningfully from the driver's seat. Shouta nodded, discreetly pulling out his phone. UA did *not* have a long-sleeved swimsuit, but if they told Izuku that, he would try and fight them to let him get a cheap one for himself, so they would just have to ask Nedzu to make one.)

Izuku smacked Hitoshi's arm, splashing him when he saw him with an amused grin. Tsuyu brought pool noodles for Izuku and Shouto and they were mostly kicking around. Hitoshi splashed Izuku back, flicking his hand on the surface of the water. Most of their classmates were swimming around or floating in the water, but the four of them were all focussing on swimming lessons for now. Tsuyu gave them instructions while spotting Shouto and Hitoshi spotted Izuku.

As they moved further into the deep end of the pool, Izuku became uneasy, his hands locked on the pool noodles keeping him afloat with an iron grip. The pool was deepest at eight feet and that kind of height could overtake any of them. Tsuyu and Hitoshi stayed close as they moved into deeper waters but that didn't ease the pit growing in his

stomach.

He hated this, Izuku decided, tensely kicking the water. Shouto took to the lessons easily, his movements, awkward but right, keeping him from needlessly flailing like Izuku was prone to. He hated the feeling of being immersed in liquid. He hated the way the water reflected onto his skin. He hated how the only thing keeping him above water was a few flimsy pool noodles. He hated it when Tsuyu suggested they go back to the five-foot-deep part of the pool to practice being underwater.

As he fully submerged himself, the water seemed to turn into slime. Izuku couldn't breathe, could barely think, as he drifted to the bottom of the pool, curled up in a ball. *This isn't the slime villain,* he told himself. *I'm not being suffocated and no one is trying to kill me.*

Underneath the water, someone tapped his shoulder. Izuku opened his eyes, seeing a blurry figure-

The tapping resounded around him, forcing him to open his eyes. A figure stood outside the glass but Izuku could barely make them out. Their white coat stood starkly against the rest of the atmosphere, greenish hue surrounding both of them painting the lab coat in viridescence. Izuku tried to move, but there was something attached to his face that stopped him. Panic began to set in, and he sluggishly twitched. He pressed his right hand to the glass, his left one unable to move for some reason, like wires were sewn into his skin. The mask on his face allowed him to breathe but his arm-

His arm-

Izuku broke the surface of the water and practically launched himself out of the pool.

What the hell.

What. The. *Hell.*

"Thank you for the lessons. I'm leaving," Izuku said hoarsely. He gave the pool a wide berth as he stalked towards the exit. He could hear someone following behind him but Izuku didn't even stop at the locker rooms to gather his things. He had to know what that was, if that was even fucking *real* and not just some sick trick his mind conjured to screw with him.

And if it was real? What if it was? What if he suddenly remembered

being in a damn tank, hooked up to wires like some lab rat-

“Izuku!”

“I don’t know what they did to me when I was with them,” Izuku said anxiously. Hitoshi was hovering in his space, concern etched into his expression. “I was unconscious for- for days or weeks at a time, and I don’t know what they *did* to me, not really.”

“Did the water make you uncomfortable?” Hitoshi asked, almost making Izuku laugh.

“I thought it was because of the sludge villain first,” Izuku explained, not noticing his companion stiffening. “I-I thought that it was because I didn’t like being reminded of being suffocated, and I don’t, but then I opened my eyes and-” He choked on his next words, whispering, “I was in a *tank.”*

“A tank?” Hitoshi echoed in bewilderment.

“Someone was tapping on the glass,” he said in distress. “They were wearing a lab coat, and I- Toshi, wires were *in* me.”

The hand he pressed against the glass had been so, so *small.*

Izuku vomited, barely avoiding Hitoshi’s bare feet.

All those precious Nomus, the Doctor pouted, thinking of Hosu with his head pressed against his clipboard. *Months of work destroyed in a few hours.* Two of them had been caught by the heroes, that is what Tomura said, returning with the only winged one. The Doctor scoffed, more like *destroyed.*

Lifting his head from the clipboard, the Doctor resumed examining his other Nomus. All for One had been rather pleased with the first few Nomus’ strength and offered to lend him more resources to speed the process up further.

When the Nomu projects first began, the Doctor worked mainly with theory. Finding ways to stuff many quirks inside one person was a trying endeavor, but All for One could always find him a subject to test a hypothesis on. Even one quirk forced on the wrong person could kill the subject or leave them a braindead husk, so they needed to find

a way to weed out the weaker hosts and single out the ones who could handle the quirks.

“Quirk factor” was the layman’s term for the specialized cells that mutated to create quirks. Nearly everyone in the current world possessed some of them. Families often carried similar ones, passing down the mutation to their children, whose quirk would then possess traits of their parents’ quirks. There were outlier cases, of course, where the chromosomes from both parents were transformed into something wholly different.

And there, with the outliers, is where they found the most successful subjects.

Something in their DNA contributed to a completely new quirk that had little to no correlation with their parents and it made their bodies able to more easily adjust to another quirk without becoming a corpse.

Of course, they were not a complete success. Their minds deteriorated rapidly after a quirk was given to them. The Doctor had been frustrated with the limits of their project. All for One asked for sentient creatures. He wanted something that could *think*. But there was only so much he could do with subjects that did not live.

All for One had calmed him, saying that there were still uses for the other Nomu. All for One told him that they had time to cultivate the perfect Nomu.

An opportunity was soon given to them on a silver platter. A boy that carried the signs of outlier DNA. His mother’s quirk, telekinesis, was undoubtedly dissimilar to the boy’s quirk. The father’s quirk, while unknown at the time, proved to be no wrench in the Doctor’s plans. His outlier theory held true, the boy simply needed some readjustments and he would be ready for the assimilation of a new quirk.

His left arm was mangled beyond belief when he arrived, granting him a grand opportunity to test the recreation of mobility and nerves in a living subject, whose own limb was already ruined to begin with.

He looked back at the empty tank sitting in the corner of the laboratory. The Doctor smiled. He would have his experiment back soon enough.

All for One rarely broke his promises after all.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for the kudos and comments from last chapter!

Another traumatized child appears

Chapter Summary

Izuku has to remember his hideout etiquette

Chapter Notes

Me, realizing I don't know how to wrote Monoma or Kouta: oh no

Also me, who's been planning this particular chapter since the sports festival arc: omg it's happening

I wrote most of this yesterday

I decided that context is such a hassle and I'm not bothering so a change has been made on the 14th of june and if you notice, cool, if you don't, also cool. If you weren't here for my fumble, cool

Izuku told Hitoshi to go without him when he told Izuku about the mall trip their class would be taking. It had been a few days since his freakout at the pool but his whole body was still on edge. Handling being around tons of people was not something he trusted himself to do right now.

With his permission, Yamada gave him a smothering hug before he left for his day patrol, leaving Izuku and Aizawa alone in the house. Aizawa napped on the couch, a couple of the cats curled up around him. Izuku squirmed in the silence of his home, uneasy. He didn't like it. He reminded himself that Aizawa was still there, that he wasn't alone, but panic chased rational thought from his mind.

He sat down on the floor by where Aizawa's head lay on the couch. He pulled his knees to his chest and dropped his head onto his knees. *I'm fine,* he told himself. *Aizawa is right there, I am not alone.*

He felt cold.

Impulsively, Izuku grabbed Aizawa's hand off the couch and put it on his head, pressing his hand down with Izuku's own hands and shuddering at the contact. Somehow, people were always so *warm.* Any contact tended to send his nerves into overdrive, but Izuku longed to feel that sensation. He was too afraid to ask for anything directly. He never learned how to ask for things like a hug, so he tried to communicate through body language. But his family didn't have

mind-reading quirks, and he couldn't expect them to know what he wanted if he never bothered to ask for it.

This isn't exactly asking, Izuku thought as he held Aizawa's hand down, *but it will do.*

"Problem child?" Aizawa grumbled. Izuku pressed his eyes shut, body trembling as he waited for Aizawa to wrench his hand away from him. "Are you okay?"

Aizawa's hand moved in his hair, gently sifting through his curls. "You can ask for physical contact," he paused before tacking on, "I won't take away my hand, Izuku."

He relaxed his grip on Aizawa's hand but kept his hands in place. "It's quiet without them here," Izuku said, finally breaking the silence.

"Hizashi taught the cats something once we had all of them," Aizawa said, both amused and disgruntled. "Would you like to hear it?"

Izuku opened his eyes and glanced at the cats. He looked back to Aizawa in confusion. Still, he nodded. He whistled an odd, choppy chime and all the cats that weren't in the room already, one by one, filed into the room.

"Zashi was trying to get them into a routine while they were still skittish with us and managed to somehow get them all to do this." He stared intently at all the cats crowding around the living room and let out a deadpan, "Meow."

Immediately, the room erupted with responding meows and yowling.

Over the noise, Aizawa turned back to him and said, "Hana's leg was broken when we found her and he was trying to get her to know how to call for help, but they all ended up knowing how to do this instead."

Izuku stared at the ongoing caterwauling and laughed. "Really?"

"We can't watch cat videos without headphones in now, or this-" he gestured at the cats, still screaming. "-will happen."

"How long does it last?" Izuku asked, watching Tora walk over Smoothie's stretched out body and trip into the coffee table's leg.

"Depends on the day, honestly."

Izuku laughed again as Aizawa slid down to the ground and pressed against his side. He leaned his head against his shoulder and relaxed. Cheese headbutted the back of his head from the couch and jumped into Aizawa's lap. They stayed like that for a while, just sitting and waiting for the noise to die down.

This was nice, Izuku decided. Having a family was nice.

Tomura scratched his neck and hissed at the pain. The new recruits were in the bar with Kurogiri tending to them, and he was getting restless . All those new characters were joining their party because they thought Stain supported their cause. Muscular and his bloodlust came to mind, and Tomura rolled his eyes. Where Moonfish came from, he didn't even want to know, but Kurogiri put him in isolation after he tried to eat their guests more than a few times.

How did he get these people to follow him? None of them are closely following his ideals, some of them even went *against* his ideology.

So why were they devoted to him?

He stood and left his room. He needed to get out of this building, away from the recruits and Sensei. When he wanted to ask Kurogiri to warp him earlier, he'd been too preoccupied reeling in their new guests to bother listening to him.

Izuku could explain this to him, Tomura realized. Izuku could always see the reasoning behind the mastermind's plots when they were kids. He could tell Tomura about the reason they wanted to conquer the lands or end humanity or *whatever*.

He wanted to ask Sensei to let him find Izuku again, but Sensei asked for his patience, asked him to *wait*. Tomura pulled his hand away from his neck and scowled. After the Sports Festival, Sensei promised that he would be able to take Izuku when the chance came, but it had and Izuku was still with those stupid heroes.

Tomura was *done* waiting. He wanted to see Izuku again, he wanted to bask in his calming presence and rid himself of the jittery rage that threatened to consume him. Sensei told him to give into the madness and become a true paragon of evil, but Tomura didn't think Izuku would want to see him if he was unhinged.

Frustration nearly made him scream. Before they attacked the USJ, he had never thought about what *Izuku* wanted. Faded memories of his wide-eyed face kept him company on lonely nights but he never questioned Sensei or the Doctor until Izuku reappeared in his life. The horror on his face when he saw the Nomu would be seared into his mind forever, his voice asking, *what did you do to them?*

Something Izuku said tugged on his thoughts regularly after the USJ attack.

"Don't you remember how they shunned you, Izuku? How society let you to rot-"

"Like you did?"

He hated that it was true. After Sensei deemed him useless, they cast him aside. Like everyone else.

Tomura remembered walking through the crowded streets, alone, and trembled with rage. Sensei told him that they were going to create a better world, one where people didn't depend on heroes to do everything for them. But they weren't heroes, they were the opposite, actually, and Izuku was burned by them, too.

One day, if Sensei decided that he was useless, Tomura wondered if he would be discarded in the same way. As if he were nothing more than a piece on a board.

A pawn.

"Tomura," Sensei's static voice said through the TV in his room. *"I have a new quest for you and your party to complete."*

He bit down on his irritation. Tomura needed to talk to Izuku, not with Sensei. Not while he was having these doubts. "What is it, Sensei?"

"UA will be hosting a summer training camp," he said. *"I would like you to show them how powerful your new Vanguard is."*

The bus ride to the training camp location was spent tinkering with his shoes. Izuku had taken to wearing them as his regular shoes instead of his usual sneakers and he found some flaws in the make up

of his thrusters. The tech that allowed him to hover and practically fly around was vulnerable to electromagnetic interference, as seen when Kaminari experimented with his quirk, and Izuku wanted to prevent his support gear from failing on him. The shoes also managed to put in enough power to support the weight of more people after Mei hooked him up with a new type of power cycle to build up enough energy to carry multiple people.

At the pitstop, Izuku put on his shoes and walked off the bus. *They should be lighter,* Izuku thought. *The new system was lighter than the Shield tech because it wasn't composed of the same hardware and Yaoyorozu helped him replace the metal, so-*

Hitoshi elbowed him and he looked up from his shoes. Izuku gasped at the sight of the Wild Wild Pussycats. Apparently, he missed what they said because the ground was suddenly disappearing and- wait, everyone else was freaking out, too.

Izuku powered on his shoes and started grabbing his classmates. The others caught on quickly and Izuku realized that there were way too many people hanging onto him as his shoes stuttered in the air.

"Haiyama!" Izuku's head snapped towards Aizawa's voice. "Drop them!"

His classmates screamed their opposition to this order but his shoes finally gave into the gravity of holding ten of his classmates. They all tumbled to the ground in time to watch a beast form from the ground.

Crap.

Izuku's legs were lead as they all stopped in front of the lodge. Monoma was the 1-B replacement for Bakugo. He only noticed his presence when they began fighting the woodland monsters somehow. Hitoshi said that he had been brooding in the back of the bus for the entire ride. He also chuckled about how the teachers could only handle one erratic blonde at a time. Some of his classmates asked about what happened at the pool, now that they could catch his attention, but Izuku waved them off. He guessed that they didn't press, however, because of the way Hitoshi loomed in the background like a guard dog.

After he managed to explain to Hitoshi what he saw, then to his

parents, Izuku hadn't been in the most stable state of mind. The vision put him in a bad place, one he would rather not go again.

The black-haired boy with the red cap glared at them all with an astonishing amount of hatred. Izuku caught his eye for a moment and waved from a safe distance. Adorably, he huffed and turned away. He reminded Izuku of Bakugo, with his stubbornly placed glare, though he was significantly more quiet in comparison to Bakugo. Mandalay introduced him as Kouta, her nephew.

After they all put their luggage away, Izuku herded Hitoshi to the dining area. Both of them were half-asleep at this point but their need to eat overwhelmed their drooping eyelids. Izuku blinked and realized people were leaving to go into an onsen. Suddenly, Izuku felt wide awake. He rubbed his arms self consciously.

It's not that his classmates hadn't already seen his scars, but their view was previously limited to glimpses in the locker room. In an onsen, he would be completely exposed. Izuku slinked away from his peers, deciding to wait until later to enjoy the hot spring. He sat on the dirt outside the building and leaned back against the wall. Izuku inhaled the warm air of the forest and leaned his head back against the wooden railing behind him. Izuku closed his eyes, drifting to sleep…

"What are you doing out here?"

Izuku startled at the snappish tone and blinked at Kouta. "What?" he said dumbly.

The boy's scowl only became more withering. "The rest of your hero-loving friends went to bed where they were supposed to be. Unlike *you,"* he said pointedly.

"Ah," Izuku said. "I was, uh, I was waiting for them to be done."

Kouta snickered. "What, embarrassed?"

Izuku rubbed the exposed scar on his neck, ears burning. "No, just uncomfortable," he replied, averting his eyes to the ground. When he looked back at Kouta, he was staring at Izuku with shock.

"You have a scar," he said quietly.

Chuckling softly, Izuku nodded. "More than my fair share," he lifted his left hand out for Kouta to see. Izuku was wearing long sleeves, but his scars trailed up his entire hand, leaving more than enough gnarled

tissue for Kouta to see. “The biggest ones are mostly my fault,” Izuku confessed. Kouta cautiously touched Izuku’s scarred hand and Izuku allowed the contact, even if it made him want to squirm.

“How did you get them?” Kouta asked.

Izuku paused to think of a kid-friendly approach to saying how he managed to mangle himself trying to bring back his child abandoning mother, then how his friend mangled him in a fit of rage after Izuku destroyed a Nomu.

“I was looking for something, when I got this one,” Izuku explained tentatively. “I stuck my arm into something and it collapsed on me.”

Kouta’s eyes drifted to his neck. “And that one?”

He hesitated, his free hand drifting to the warped patch of skin. “I-” Izuku’s voice cut off and Kouta dropped Izuku’s hand, kicking at the dirt.

“You don’t have to tell me,” he muttered. “My parents never liked to tell me about their scars, either.” Before Izuku could respond, Kouta clammed up, his glare slipping back into place.

“Go take your stupid bath!” he snapped. “You stink!”

Izuku watched, bewildered, as Kouta stomped off.

Izuku decided very quickly that he would not like this kind of training. Hitoshi agreed with him, grumbling about the early hour they were forced to wake up at. Quirk training for both of them would require another person, more if they were actually going to push themselves. Monoma was grouped with them, interestingly enough. Aizawa said that they would need to alternate using their quirks on each other.

Sluggish from his late night and tense from the anticipation of being told to use his quirk on someone, Izuku barely registered Monoma’s snobby attitude.

“Who wants to go first?” Izuku said after no one moved.

“What even are your quirks?” Monoma asked.

Izuku shared a wary glance with Hitoshi. “Insecurity,” he said. “When I have skin on skin contact with someone, I force them to face their insecurities. It’s also got some sensory add-ons.”

“Brainwashing,” Hitoshi said, not missing a beat. “If someone answers a question I ask, I can control their movements.”

Monoma looked between them with a look that said, ‘that’s fucked up’, but only said, “Copy. After I touch someone, I can copy their quirk.”

Hitoshi started them off, brainwashing the two of them, testing what they could do and how long he could hold his control for. Monoma went next, testing Brainwashing and then Insecurity on them.

Izuku gaped at the dark void around him that appeared after Monoma touched him. It was exactly what Ayumi and Aizawa said it would be like. The version of him that came into existence shocked him. Other Izuku smiled at him, his face and body glitching and giving him glimpses of other versions of himself until Other Izuku changed entirely.

“It would have been better if you were quirkless,” spat a version of him. Inko’s voice overlapped his own.

Other Izuku switched again, this time turning into one with vacant eyes and wires hanging from his arm. *“They turned you into a monster,”* Other Izuku said, pointing at his scars. *“Can’t you see it? Can’t you feel how much they messed you up?”*

Glitching into something abruptly small, Other Izuku began to wail. He couldn’t have been more than five, with a singed t-shirt and unscarred limbs. *“Mom!”* he sobbed, cleaving Izuku’s heart into pieces. *“I made them leave-”*

Other Izuku slammed into him, suddenly huge and snarling. A Nomu with his eyes growled at him, *“You made them leave!”* and snapped his razor sharp teeth together a hair away from Izuku’s face. *“All you do is cause pain-”*

And then it stopped.

Izuku wasn’t ashamed to say that as soon as Monoma released him, he fell on his ass. Was that really what it felt like? Was that what he did to people? Izuku feels terrible, why were they having him do that to people? He shouldn’t be doing this. He shouldn’t be here.

“C’mon,” Hitoshi said, his voice barely steady as he dusted himself off. Izuku realized he had fallen, too, and clenched his jaw in shame. Hitoshi smacked the back of his head and offered him a hand. “Don’t think too much about that until you’re in a good place again.”

The rest of the day passed in an uneasy blur. Class 1-B arrived and shouted greetings at Monoma and teased him about being in 1-A, training with *Surge.* Izuku and Hitoshi laughed at the statement, quickly trying to hide their smiles when Monoma glared at them.

Come dinner time, they had started to train with some of the other students intermittently. Monoma needed to practice with multiple quirks and Izuku and Hitoshi’s quirks needed to be tested for not only endurance but also how many people they could manage to hold. Izuku tried not to think about what was happening to them when he touched them. These people were his friends and his classmates, he didn’t want to hurt them. But this was training. Training that Izuku needed, especially after everything he did to himself in the past.

The past a bitch, though, and his skin was absolutely *crawling.* Too many people, he thought, hands shaking and heart racing. He wanted to claw it off, he needed to get rid of the feeling of all their hands touching his arms and hands. Izuku, jittering and tense, asked Aizawa if he could go find a long sleeved shirt. Izuku returned to the common area in time to see Kouta leaving into the forest.

Izuku looked away from Kouta’s retreating figure and at the curry ingredients with apprehension. He only knew how to cook basic things because that was all he ever bought himself. His first dinner at the Hatsumes’ house, he practically cried at the taste of the food. Every meal he had now still felt like a gift from above.

Hitoshi led him through the process they were tasked with and soon there was a bowl of curry in front of him. Izuku ate a bite and nearly choked himself with a laugh.

“What is there to laugh about?” Hitoshi groused, pausing in his eating. “This tastes horrible.”

Izuku nodded. “Reminds me of elementary school,” he said as an explanation. Shouto gave him a curious look but said nothing.

After Izuku had his fill, he glanced around and realized Kouta had left without a bowl. Frowning, Izuku made him a bowl and tracked Kouta’s footsteps through the woods until he saw the boy sitting on the ledge of a cliff.

“Kouta!” Izuku shouted, waving widely with his free hand. “I brought you some food!”

Kouta was scowling when Izuku reached the ledge. “How’d you find my secret hideout?”

At the words “secret hideout” Izuku stopped his approach, thinking of his own hideout back at Dagobah beach. Izuku hid there when he wanted to be alone and not be bothered. “Am I intruding?” he asked nervously. Izuku offered the bowl and a utensil. “Sorry, I just wanted you to have some food.”

Kouta scoffed but snatched the bowl out of his hands. “Stay or don’t, I could care less.”

Izuku fought to keep an elated grin off of his face. He was allowed to be in Kouta’s hideout! Izuku mentally went over his hideout etiquette and sat down next to Kouta, who grimaced at the taste of the food.

Wincing, Izuku apologized. “The taste reminds me of the meals I used to have at home,” he told him, grinning. “They were garbage before I learned how to make them properly.”

That earned him an odd glance. “Didn’t your parents cook for you?”

Izuku shook his head. “My parents weren’t around for me,” he said, trying to find a way to say something but not get into his whole tragic backstory. “I didn’t have anyone around for a while.”

Chewing on the rice, Kouta didn’t meet his eyes as he asked, “Why?”

“My quirk, mostly,” Izuku answered honestly, not noticing Kouta stiffen. “I have people now, though. People who don’t care what my quirk is or what it can do. They happen to be people who cook well, too, so that doesn’t hurt.”

“Quirks are stupid,” Kouta muttered darkly, surprising Izuku with his tone. “How could people leave you alone just because they didn’t like your quirk?”

Izuku really didn’t want to explain prejudice and discrimination to an six year old. That was a job for his parents to tackle, not Izuku.

“My parents are dead,” Kouta said, making Izuku realize he had been muttering.

Dead? His parents are *dead?* Fucking *what?*

“And I think that whoever left you alone is full of- of *shit,”* he continued empathetically. “People who use quirks as excuses like that are assholes. Everyone throws around labels like “hero” and “villain” and just uses them to hate each other. Quirks are stupid, heroes are stupid, and all they did was get my parents killed.”

Oh crap, another traumatized child. Izuku didn’t know how to deal with those! Especially not an *angry* one, who happened to hate all of hero society.

“Heroes aren’t all bad,” Izuku started, earning a withering glare. “A hero saved me, and I didn’t have to be alone anymore. And what about your aunt? She saves people all the time.”

He scoffed. “Heroes only want to show off their quirks, just like all of you hero students. You’re all just going to get yourselves killed. And then what? What happens to all your families, all the people you leave behind?”

Izuku reached out in concern. “Kouta-”

He slapped Izuku’s hand away. “Go away!” he yelled, sounding close to crying. “Go! Leave me alone!”

Izuku stood but hesitated to leave. Kouta pushed him with as much force as he could probably manage. “I’m leaving,” Izuku said placatingly. “I’m leaving.”

He didn’t sleep well that night.

“A test of courage!” Pixiebob cheered.

Another day of training passed by, and Izuku was so *done* with this shit. He had an ever present headache stabbing at the lump that was his brain and he had never felt so on edge because of his skin. Hitoshi repeatedly smacked his hand during the multiple times when he tried to scratch his skin to relieve some of the itchy feeling. Aizawa told him to stop after he got his second nosebleed but the pounding in his head didn’t cease.

Everyone was divided into groups, Izuku ending up with Yaoyorozu.

He didn't know how well he would react to jump scares or any other attempts to frighten him, but he journeyed into the woods with Yaoyorozu. They yelped and tensed at 1-B's scare tactics but a strange pink fog began to permeate the air. They stopped to watch as it crept toward them.

"Do you think it's someone's quirk?" Yaoyorozu whispered.

Izuku turned on Sight, vision narrowing to the aura's inside the fog. They were dim at best, which only happened when someone was sleeping.

"They're unconscious," Izuku said, taking several steps away from the fog. "It's some kind of gas, we shouldn't breathe it in."

Without pause, Yaoyorozu handed him a gas mask. "I'll keep making these, you should-"

<Everyone, this is Mandalay!> They startled at her voice. *<There are villains in the forest, please head back to the lodge! And->* Her voice stuttered, cutting off before continuing. *<And if someone sees Kouta, please bring him with you!>*

"Kouta," Izuku whispered. He knew where Kouta's hideout was. That meant he might be the only person who knew where he was hiding.

"Yaoyorozu," Izuku called. "I need a gas mask that will fit Kouta."

Kouta was alone when he arrived, and Izuku sighed in relief.

"We gotta go, Kouta," Izuku told him urgently, giving him his gas mask. "We need to leave before-"

"Before what, Midoriya?"

A moon-casted shadow loomed over both of them, the voice rough and mocking. Izuku turned, watching as the man shedded his mask and cloak. He was wearing something that covered his skin all the way up to his chin. His blonde hair looked almost white in the moonlight but his eye gleamed with carmine bloodlust.

"The name's Muscular," he drawled.

"Y-You're him!"

Izuku kept his eyes on the villain but internally cursed Kouta for drawing attention to himself. The depraved grin on his face widened as his eye slid over to Kouta and Izuku stepped to the side to block his view.

“Kouta, run,” Izuku ordered, desperately hoping that he would bolt. But there were no sounds of running, just Kouta’s terrified breathing.

“Water Horse, right?” Muscular said cruelly. Kouta whimpered and Izuku’s resolve to get them both away from him intensified. “I remember them. I remember how *pathetic* they were in the end.”

“Shut up!” Kouta screamed.

Izuku wished this guy’s get-up didn’t cover so much skin. It would be hell to grab Kouta and run but without a good chance at catching him in his quirk, Izuku couldn’t just run in and hope Muscular’s quirk didn’t kill him.

“Admiring my get up?” he smirked. “Shigaraki told us all about your quirk, Midoriya. You won’t be getting me, so why don’t you just come quietly and save us all the trouble?”

Come quietly? “You want me to go with you?”

“Boss man says you’re the objective,”

Izuku took a step back, steeling himself to shoot over the forest with Kouta.

Muscular grinned. “Your mother made the same face before I killed her,”

He wasn’t talking to Kouta, Izuku realized, any half-formed plans going out the window as his statement set in.

“What?”

“It was years ago so the details are foggy, but I could never forget the look she gave me. I broke her hands and she *still* fought like she wanted to beat me.” He chuckled, like anything he said was funny. “I guess she was trying to get back to your sorry ass, huh?”

Izuku didn’t think as he launched himself at Muscular. Too much was happening inside his head. Too much information was coming together to paint an ugly picture.

She wanted to come back.

That was all he could think, as Muscular caught him by the throat with gloved hands.

She wanted to come back.

To him. To Izuku.

The pain barely registered as he was slammed into the mountainside, choked by this murderer's hands. All he could think of was that this man stopped her from coming home. He was the reason Izuku was left alone for so long. Izuku hadn't been abandoned.

She wanted to come back.

Izuku began to scrape at the arm holding him up.

"I'm lucky, you know?" He said over Kouta's pleas for him to let Izuku go. Muscular grabbed the arm clawing into his forearm and twisted until there was a sickening crack. "I get to put an end to both of your families tonight."

Izuku kicked the backs of his shoes against the mountainside and roared as they were both propelled forward. Izuku climbed up his body, shock loosening Muscular's grip on his neck, and stabbed a finger into his good eye. Unfortunately, Muscular dropped Izuku, preventing him from keeping him inside his quirk.

"What is it with your families and going for my eyes?" he shrieked in rage.

Izuku couldn't just leave him to wander around, he realized, watching Muscular stumbled around with blood leaking from his eye. He still had no idea what he could do.

Izuku slid their gas masks on and ran with superpowered shoes, loudly leading Muscular into the forest. For a blind man, he was frighteningly accurate with his blows, smashing through the forest after them. Once they were fully inside the pink fog, Izuku leapt into a tree and powered off his shoes, making it as clear to Kouta as he could that they needed to be silent.

"What's up with the air?" Muscular grumbled, sniffing the air in confusion. "Oi, Midoriya, you can't run forever!"

Izuku hugged Kouta tighter, and was responded to with his tiny hands clutching his shirt in a trembling iron grip. As Muscular wandered deeper into the fog, Izuku listened carefully. A loud thud and a quick check with Sight allowed him to know that Muscular had fallen asleep. Izuku climbed down the tree, and scanned the area with Sight, cautious of running into any other villains on their way back to the lodge.

<Students of UA,> Izuku flinched at Mandalay's sudden words. *<You are allowed to fight back with your quirks. Protect yourselves and your classmates!>*

Izuku hoped that everyone had been defending themselves before they received permission but was glad to be able to legally defend himself nonetheless.

Breathing didn't come easy, not after Muscular tried to choke him out, but he was able to creep through the forest in a nearly silent manner. Izuku had no idea where they were anymore. The chase had turned him around and twisted his sense of direction, so they were just wandering around. Sounds occasionally erupted around him and they would stop to hide, but they didn't run into anyone until a few minutes after leaving the fog.

Shoji covered them with his arms as Dark Shadow raged behind them.

"I have a plan," Izuku rasped, hoping they would all survive the night.

A few minutes later, a man with metal teeth was lying limp on the ground and Shouto held a flame for Tokoyami to stand by. Tokage from 1-B gave him a wave, carrying one of her unconscious classmates on her back.

Kouta trembled in his arms, hiding his face in Izuku's shoulder. "We need to get Kouta back to the lodge," Izuku said, voice breaking. His friends eyed his neck and arm, where he had obviously been injured.

"Agreed," Shouto murmured.

They ran into Tsuyu and Uraraka, who were fighting a… school girl?

"Surge!" she cried out in obvious delight. "Hi! I'm Toga!"

The resulting commotion didn't last very long, concluding with Toga running away. They didn't make it far until they ran into another villain.

“Hello, students, you may call me Mr. Compress!” crowed a masked man in a yellow coat. “I believe you have something I desire, so allow me to take Surge off your hands.”

His friends immediately blocked his path and Kouta held onto him tighter.

“Run, Izuku, we’ve got this guy handled.” Shouto said, not taking his eyes off of Mr. Compress.

Trusting his friends and hoping, Izuku turned and ran through the forest.

Without warning, blue flames shot in their path. A man with stapled skin and a sickening smile tsked. “Don’t run off now, Surge. I thought heroes were supposed to fight the villains.”

A blur slammed into the fire villain, scarves and a red glow letting Izuku know that he wasn’t a threat. The villain turned to sludge as Aizawa’s capture weapon tightened around him. Izuku nearly wept with relief as his dad stood and met his eyes.

“Are you okay?” And it wasn’t until them that Izuku was fully reminded of his injuries. He barely cared, though, when Kouta was still shaking in his arms.

“Dad,” Izuku croaked. Aizawa looked impossibly more alert as Izuku rushed into him. Careful of Kouta in his arms and the throbbing pain of his broken arm, Izuku leaned his face into Aizawa’s chest and allowed himself a moment of relief. Aizawa was here. Aizawa would keep them safe.

Aizawa repeated his question and Izuku answered him this time. Pulling out of their pseudo embrace, Aizawa glanced around the forest. “Let’s go, I’m not sure how many clones there are.”

Izuku could see the windows of the lodge the next time they encountered a villain. A Nomu with chainsaws for hands stepped in their way, its head angled towards Izuku. He took a step to the side and the Nomu matched him, advancing a step. He put Kouta on the ground slowly.

“Kouta,” Izuku met his tearful eyes with as much calm in his voice as he could muster. “I need you to actually go this time, okay? Go straight to the lodge.”

Kouta nodded and Izuku could feel Aizawa's gaze buring into the back of his head. The nomu didn't move as Kouta rushed past it.

Izuku turned back to the Nomu and gulped.

"What should we do?" Izuku whispered, staring at the unmoving Nomu. Aizawa grabbed his capture weapon, eyes beginning to glow red as he stepped forward.

"Your friends are *quite* tenacious, Surge!"

Whipping around, the last thing Izuku saw was Mr. Compress' hand reaching out at him before everything-

Compressed .

Additions to the Pile of Problems™

Chapter Notes

cackles in the distance

i get to add those two tags and I am overjoyed

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shouto couldn't reach him.

The Nomu kept him and Aizawa occupied since they were the two most equipped to handle it. His teacher needed help and if he left- if he left for Izuku- he might end up losing his other friends, too. Dark shadow was still too volatile to risk letting loose without Shouto to restrain him, Tokage was carrying an injured classmate, and Uraraka and Tsuyu didn't have the brute force to take on a Nomu. Aizawa could restrain the Nomu and make sure its chainsaws didn't work, but he needed Shouto to finish the job. He needed Shouto to make sure this thing couldn't harm anyone. But all that meant, Shouto thought as he turned the Nomu's brain to ashes, was that he couldn't reach Izuku.

Mr. Compress could be halfway across the forest by the time the Nomu fell.

When the Nomu's body didn't begin to regenerate, Aizawa turned to all of them and Shouto straightened at the sheer amount of rage seeping off of him.

"Go to the lodge," he ordered in a voice Shouto had never heard before.

And then he was gone, sprinting off into the forest again and leaving them with an order to retreat when their friend had been kidnapped right in front of them.

Shouto stepped towards the forest, everything inside him *burning.*

"Students of 1-A, get inside!"

Vlad King ushered them inside, practically brute-forcing them into moving into the relative safety of the lodge. Their classmates, from 1-A and 1-B alike began to clamor, raising their voices to question them about their friends, about who is still *alive-*

“Shouto,” Hitoshi said, suddenly in front of him, gripping his shoulders with trembling, bruising strength. “Shouto, where is Izuku? He didn’t come back with Yaoyorozu.”

The boy that Izuku saved, Kouta, stood at Hitoshi’s side. Glaring at him through his tears, it felt like he was daring Shouto to say anything other than, *“He’s right behind me.”*

Shouto had never been good with dares.

So he said nothing.

“They took him,” Tsuyu said, answering for him. The students quieted, the atmosphere prickling at his skin and making him avoid their eyes. “The villains kidnapped Midoriya.”

Izuku woke up bound to a table. Panic clawed at his throbbing throat and the strap meant to restrain his head movement wasn’t helping, the binding pressing into his neck and irritating his injury as he squirmed. His limbs were bound in the same manner, the thick straps holding him down securely. As far as he could tell, no one else was in his general vicinity, but he didn’t put much stock into his senses or his limited view, so he muffled the scratchy sounds of pain that escaped as he struggled against his bindings. His arm and neck were the only real injuries he had to worry about agitating, but, injuries or not, Izuku had to make some kind of attempt to escape.

With no foreseeable ways out, Izuku set to thinking. The League of Villains attacked, that’s why Izuku was taken, right? Because Tomura wanted to… see him? Have him join them? But if that were the case, they would have him in a more hospitable area, somewhere that Tomura could speak to Izuku and Izuku could talk back, instead of where he was currently.

Izuku’s breath caught in his throat with a stab of pain as he realized where, exactly, he had been put. His struggling increased tenfold as the quiet bubbling of nearby tanks were likely sitting. He was strapped to a reclined chair that was hardly his size. Izuku doubted he was the first person to ever be bound to it unwillingly.

A door squeaked open outside of his view and he thrashed against his restraints, huffing and wheezing in pain and exertion.

“No need to be so dramatic, Midoriya.” The man who came into view tsked and poked at his neck, eliciting a muffled whine from Izuku. “This is hardly the first time I’ve operated on you, why are you causing such a fuss?”

He cursed Muscular for going for his throat, leaving him unable to spit something back at the man in retaliation. Instead, he had to painstakingly catch his breath as the man introduced himself.

“I tried to keep you sedated, so you may not remember me,” the man confessed distractedly. “I am the Doctor, and I remade your arm. It was a nasty injury, you’ll recall, so perhaps it isn’t too much to ask for some gratitude. I don’t *need* to make this a difficult experience for either of us, and neither do you. But if you force my hand…” Izuku let out a hoarse shriek as the Doctor’s hand squeezed his broken arm. “All for One won’t mind another subject who can’t think for themselves.”

Where was Tomura? Izuku found himself pushing at his restraints despite the pain, his whole body trembling. Tomura wouldn’t let this happen, he- he *wouldn’t!*

Right?

“I would like to mention that Shigaraki is terribly fond of you, though.” The Doctor sighed. “If I give you back to them without your mind intact, he may throw one of his temper tantrums.”

A clink sounded and Izuku’s whole body tensed in anticipation for something horrible.

“I wouldn’t worry too much, Midoriya. This won’t even be that bad compared to what All for One will do once you are fully prepared.”

All for One? Izuku blinked at the ceiling, confusion taking the place of some of his hysterical panic. *All for One, like One for All?*

He wasn’t given the chance to ponder his query, a light pinch in his arm indicating a needle breaking through his skin.

Izuku drifted off, images of All Might’s injury flashing in the back of his mind.

Is Surge as Heroic as We Think?

UA student Midoriya Izuku, hero alias: *Surge,* is widely known for being given the credit of meeting the Hero Killer: *Stain's* criteria of a "true hero". Before that, we see him give a controversial speech during the UA Sports Festival as the first years representative and eventually be beaten by Todoroki Shouto, the Number Two Hero: *Endeavour's* son in the third round. People have been enamored with the idea of a young hero in training who has a heroic demeanor and is willing to give a voice to people with weak quirks like himself.

But how much do we really know about Surge? Is he really the go-getting, selfless student we have all been led to believe?

Our sources say otherwise. A recently opened case in Musutafu's police department details Surge's interactions with the League of Villains (LoV) years before they ever attacked the Unforeseen Simulation Joint (USJ) on UA's campus. According to the case file, Surge was kidnapped by the League and released into the real world not too long after, not doing anything notable until he passed the UA entrance exam. Student essays, which are released to the public when exams are finished, are prompted by questions the principal of UA poses about hero society. Surge's answers are quite telling about his view of our world as it is.

Surge wrote about how "toxic" and "unstable" our society is, and how we are all boxed into a category that we may or may not fit in. He practically called for a complete overhaul of our systems and way of life, saying that the Number One Hero: *All Might's* era of peace would only lead to more and more criminal activity once he retired. Remind me again what the League of Villains' motives are? The LoV's motives for attacking the USJ were said to be to kill All Might and destroy our society. Correct me if I'm wrong, but those two trains of thought aren't too distant from each other.

His recent "kidnapping" took place at the supposedly secret location that only the students and two of UA's faculty were made aware of. How is it possible that the League would attack, if not for a mole? Why would the LoV continue to target Class 1-A for this summer training camp instead of All Might, their supposed target, unless they had to find some way to retrieve Surge without arousing suspicion?

So, now we are posing the question: Who is Surge really? Hero student or an undercover villain waiting to turn traitor?

Shouta bowed to the vultures shouting questions and accusations with clenched fists kept firmly at his side. Each question was another stab in an open wound.

Is UA investigating Surge as a potential leak?

Were you aware that Surge was a potential threat to UA's security?

Why was Surge allowed admittance to UA when he had connections to the League?

What precautions is UA going to take to prevent another traitor from walking its halls?

By the end of the conference, Shouta would have throttled someone if not for Nedzu's grounding weight on his shoulder as they exited. He didn't hesitate, however, to slam his fist into the wall once he was alone with Vlad.

How dare they accuse Izuku of working with the League. How dare they say he's a *traitor* when he's been through so much and worked through his trauma to grow. Shouta was going to find whoever leaked the information on Izuku's file and *tear them apart.*

"Aizawa," Vlad started.

"Don't." Shouta snarled, still facing the wall. "This *never* should have happened. Not on our watch. Not when we knew the League saw him as a target. Not when we are supposed to be the finest hero school in the goddamn country." Shouta turned back to Vlad, and sympathy wormed through his fury when he saw the guilt laid plain on Vlad's face. "Any word on the investigation?"

He shook his head morosely. "With Kurogiri as their transport, there is no telling where their base is. We have a possible location in Kamino, a bar we've been scouting for a few weeks as a possible location, but it's nothing solid. Once the captured members of the League wake up, we can question them, but there's no telling if they'll give us real intel since we can't negotiate with villains of their caliber. Muscular and Moonfish are on their way to Tartarus as we speak, but Mustard is being detained elsewhere until we're sure he won't tell us anything."

Shouta went home to a quiet house. It had been a quiet few days, and

Shouta was reminded of Izuku's, *"It's quiet without them here,"* when he reached out to Shouta for comfort. Comfort that he couldn't give him now, when he likely needed it, because Shouta had *failed* him.

Hitoshi was holed up in his room, and Shouta would never be able to forget the expression of despair that dawned on his face when Shouta finally found his way back to the lodge, empty-handed.

Ayumi and Mitsu were contacted, and the eerie silence on the other end of the line when Shouta told them the news, the abrupt click that ended the call, was another puncture to his heart, knowing that he failed them, too.

Hizashi tried his best to stay positive, but nothing could help all that much when they were trying to cope with Izuku's absence and scrambling to find him by grasping at straws.

The boy that he saved, Kouta, wouldn't stop crying when he saw Shouta shake his head in response to his students' harried questions about Izuku. When Mandalay tried to comfort him, he went off on them, shouting about how heroes were supposed to protect people, *save* them, like Izuku told him.

Ragdoll's kidnapping was another addition to their pile of problems. Her quirk would have been instrumental in being able to find Izuku, but instead, they had neither of them. It was selfish of Shouta to be more irritated that Ragdoll wasn't around to find Izuku and not that she was kidnapped in the first place, but Izuku was his son. His problem child.

And he had no idea if Izuku was *dead* or *alive* or something worse.

Because apparently, they used Izuku like some sort of lab rat to test god knows what in the past and what would stop them from doing that again?

Izuku woke up again, unrestrained this time. It was as if someone tossed him onto the floor, uncaring of how his body was positioned awkwardly. His arm was in a stiff cast, which Izuku took as a good sign. If his arm was just *healed* mysteriously, like his left arm, there would be much more panic going on in his brain. But nope, just a cast, *thank god.*

“Midoriya Izuku,”

All at once, any sense of calm left his body.

“Tell me,” the voice drawled, connected to a man that had wires trailing from his body and an oxygen mask around his… face. No, Izuku decided. That imitation of a peeled potato did not constitute being called a face. “Why do you want to be a hero?”

“To help people,” Izuku answered honestly, the words wavering due to his fear. “To help people like I needed to be helped.”

“And you plan to do that by being a hero?” he chuckled, the oxygen mask fogging as he exhaled. “How naive.”

Izuku pushed himself to his feet, feeling defensive despite the inexplicable tremors in his body being caused by the villain in front of him. “And I suppose you think I could do more as a villain?”

“Unhindered by what society says is immoral and illegal, I *know* you could do more.”

“You look pretty *hindered* from where I’m standing,” Izuku said, referring to the man’s obvious condition.

His body suddenly thrust towards the ground, forcing him to land hard on his knees in front of the man. Izuku regretted opening his smartass mouth as he reached a hand towards Izuku’s face and his body refused to listen when he tried to fling himself away. Frozen in place, terror riddled his body as the man placed his hand on Izuku’s face.

“You should know, Midoriya Izuku, that while I may look like this, I am not hindered.” He leaned in, the smile on his face making Izuku’s skin crawl. “Not in the least.”

Izuku barely registered the tendrils connecting themselves to him before pain exploded in his head and hands.

As it faded, whatever hold the man had on his body was released, and he slumped at the man’s feet. Everything around him felt *fuzzy*.

“I have little use for the quirk I gave you, considering I have a much more powerful version now. I even considered simply letting it die with her, but I’m glad that I got this chance, aren’t you?” the man asked, nudging Izuku with his foot. “I believe she called her quirk

Pull, yes?”

Izuku didn’t have the energy to respond before he slipped into unconsciousness.

Chapter End Notes

> remember how in canon, they found the nomu factory bc momo had that dude meld a tracker to the nomu? well, if you recall, that nomu has been disposed of, sooooo

Collared and Tailored

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The moment Izuku woke up, he knew that this was not his bed. The blankets wrapped around him were too thin and the chill in the air seeped into his body. His arm, in its cast, gave him no pain, and his neck didn't give him nearly as much trouble as it had when he woke up strapped to that chair.

Still, his body ached. The deep-seated soreness was oddly reminiscent of how his quirk pains felt, but they were not the same. Not at all. This… this feeling filled him, clouded his brain and clogged his lungs. It made him lethargic where the pain of choking his own quirk would give him a needle-like throbbing. He was coherent, but barely. Barely.

Izuku tried to remember what happened before he passed out. His thoughts were slow, muddled by whatever kept him in this state. He remembered the training camp, being kidnapped, the Doctor.

All for One.

"Izuku?"

He stilled at the sound of Tomura's voice so close to him.

"I know you're awake."

Stubbornly, Izuku didn't move to turn over and face him. Clinging to his clarity, Izuku did not give in to the mushy bits of his brain telling him *yay, Raki's here!* Because he knew it was really, *oh no, Tomura kidnapped me here.*

"Izuku, please," Tomura said. "Sensei said he gave you a quirk, so I need to make sure you are okay."

It was his worry that finally pushed Izuku to turn over to face him. "Feels weird," Izuku said lowly, not meeting Tomura's searching gaze, instead focussing on the artist's gloves he wore. "Too full."

Tomura knelt beside him, concern etched into every twitch and furtive glance. "I wanted to talk to you," he whispered. Izuku chuffed half-heartedly with a grim sense of humor. He finally met Tomura's eyes,

hoping to convey what his mouth was too cotton-filled to say.

You did all this to talk *with me?*

He leaned back a little, pink rising high on his cheeks, so Izuku thought it was safe to say he understood.

"No, no," he said petulantly. "People need to see that the League is still a force to be reckoned with. You were just loot from our raid."

"I thought I was player two?" Izuku said teasingly, stumbling over the words with slow enunciations. He dazedly pushed himself upright, darkness blacking out his vision before eventually receding. Izuku blinked, feeling like time slowed with each second that passed.

Tomura was sitting beside him now. When did he get there?

"-Izuku?"

He made a noise in response, wondering why Tomura was saying his name.

"I… I was just asking if you wanted to rest some more?"

Oh, Izuku thought. *That sounds nice.* Izuku's head drooped slowly in what was meant to be a nod, but by the time he blinked again, Izuku was nestled back under the covers. With his face pressed back into the pillow, it was ridiculously easy to drift back into his slumber.

Tomura watched Izuku fall asleep with a frown on his face.

Sure, he had known that having another quirk assimilating into his body would take a toll but it shook him to see Izuku act so out of it. This was his friend, his *best* friend, and he didn't even know how to help him. When Sensei talked to him after Kurogiri dropped Izuku off in his room, he said that it would take time for Izuku to adjust to a new quirk.

Tomura hadn't even been told that Izuku would be receiving a quirk.

No one told him until Kurogiri was quietly explaining that the Doctor was done with him, when Tomura hadn't even known that he was doing something other than tending to his injuries. But he should have guessed. He should have thought more about why he wasn't allowed

to see Izuku, why it was taking so long for the Doctor to give him some bandages.

He hadn't, though. Instead, he entertained his new party members, trying to keep his mind *off* of Izuku like Sensei suggested.

Izuku's neck was bruised. Days old and fading, the skin still had the impression of a hand pressed into him.

Tomura's knuckles turned white as his fingers curled into the edge of the bed. Unharmed. That's what his orders were. *Unharmed.* According to the others, no one had seen him until Toga and Mr. Compress ran into their group. By then, they said he already sustained his injuries.

Mustard didn't have a proclivity for close combat, nor the hands that would match the large bruises yellowing Izuku's neck.

Moonfish would have left him in pieces or in his stomach.

That meant Muscular went after Izuku. *He* was the one who hurt Izuku. Tomura thought it was lucky that the heroes had arrested him; things would have gotten bloody if he returned.

"Tomura," Kurogiri called through his door. "May I come in?"

If he said no, Kurogiri would leave. It was one of the things he thanked him for through the years, giving him privacy where Sensei would never. The TV in his room sat in waiting, a reminder that Sensei was always there, but Kurogiri always asked to come in, always respected his autonomy.

"Yes," he responded.

Kurogiri stepped inside using the door. "How is he?" A pause. "How are you?"

"Did you know?" He said instead of answering. He knew he didn't have to explain what he meant.

"Partly," he said, one hand still on the knob of the door. "But I am not well informed, Tomura. Merely a mode of transport. I knew where I needed to take him, but that is all."

"You're not," Tomura muttered, snorting. *Mode of transport,* please, he practically raised him. "But, you were thinking about it, weren't you?" he asked. Kurogiri never liked to talk about the Nomus. He didn't like

to talk about the Doctor in general, and Tomura didn't push him.

"Sensei said not to worry you," Kurogiri said, turning away from the TV.

Tomura's blood *boiled.* He was angry, but not at Kurogiri. Once again, Sensei was the person his ire was aimed at. Once again, Sensei was treating him like he didn't matter.

"Would you like some fresh air?"

His head snapped up. Kurogiri's yellow eyes met his, then glanced at the TV.

"Yes."

Izuku blinked and, this time, the world sped up.

A vestige of someone stood in front of him, all wispy and ghost-like. She glowed a deep green, her image distorting and reforming too quickly for him to properly see her. Darkness shrouded the area around them unwilling to give him any ideas as to where he might be.

"Izuku?"

He flinched, eyes darting back to the person in front of him. She stepped forward and he stepped back. She stopped, the hand she had raised to reach out to him stilling.

"Izuku?" She murmured again, his name filling the void around them.

"Where, Where am I?" he asked, trying to think of where he could possibly be. It was familiar, but being here put him on edge. He didn't want to be here, being here meant-

Oh. Izuku glanced around again and thought it was a decent guess to say that he was in his mind-scape-thingy. He put his gaze back to the woman, wondering why she was in here with him. "Who are you?"

Her distortion stopped, her wisps sinking into a solid form, and for a moment, he saw her.

"Inko?" His voice trembled but she nodded all the same, her joy visible for a few seconds before she began to unsettle again. He rushed

forward, desperate to help and to find out what was happening. “I don’t understand, how are you here?”

“I’m sorry,” she said without answering. Once again, her hand reached out, and this time, Izuku didn’t step away. *“I’m sorry, Izuku.”*

Anger swelled at her apologies as he thought of the nights before she disappeared, of the words she last said to him.

Izuku turned his face away from her touch and she stepped away.

“He said he killed you.” She nodded. “He- He said that you, you wanted to come back.” He gulped, trying to swallow his emotions as she nodded frantically, her voice coming out in sharp whispers and echoes as she tried to reassure him.

“I think I have your quirk now,” Izuku said quietly. She dipped her head again in agreement. “I don’t really want it.”

“But you can use it,” she suggested, a certain grimness in her voice. *“I can help you, make sure you aren’t overwhelmed.”*

“Use it?” Izuku asked, almost shouting. “How? Last I checked, you couldn’t lift more than a ten-pound weight with your quirk.”

The smile she gave him was full of teeth and befitting of a beast. *“Organs don’t weigh that much,”* she said, her expression softening as realization dawned on him. *“A lot of things don’t weigh that much.”*

“I don’t want to kill anyone,” Izuku said firmly. “Not really my style, y’know?”

The area around her eyes stilled long enough for him to see the look she gave him. *“That’s alright,”* she told him. *“I’m glad it isn’t.”*

But she had made him aware of the option, should he need to make use of her power. He was sure All for One didn’t count on him thinking of using her quirk to rid someone of their internal organs. Otherwise, he had been crazy to give him Inko’s quirk.

“We are almost out of time,” she warned.

“Will I see you again?” Izuku asked, torn between his hope and pain.

She offered him a small smile. *“I love you.”*

The world around him snapped into focus, jolting him awake, and Izuku realized he was alone in the room. Unbound and fully functioning, Izuku stepped towards the door.

Kurogiri had never tried to explain the Nomu Projects to Tomura. He himself didn't have nearly the amount of knowledge to properly inform him of what the Doctor's purpose was. But he did know some things. He knew of the husks that he ferried. He knew of the Nomus sitting in waiting. He knew of the countless people that were killed to obtain such creatures.

But apathy overrode anything that could turn him away from his work. He was there to serve his master and this was how he could do it. Collared and tailored, he would obey every word, every command.

Then, Izuku.

It wasn't that Tomura didn't bring out something in him, but Izuku would have been like him, he practically would be if the new quirk settled in right instead of overtaking him. A new feeling, or perhaps an old one, made him shirk his desire to follow All for One no matter what. Izuku had been a child when the Doctor began to test on him.

Kurogiri had a body, beneath the collar, the suit, the mist. And in the moments when he isn't a taxi or a caretaker or a servant, sometimes he wonders if he was somebody.

He wondered if Izuku might ever think the same thing.

That thought chilled him to his core, everything inside of him deeply and wholly against such a thing ever happening.

So, he told Tomura about the Nomu Projects. On the other side of the city, sitting in a park, Kurogiri told Tomura what he knew. There was more, he knew. There would always be more than what he could tell him.

But with the way he clenched his fists, the way his face twisted, Kurogiri knew that he couldn't let whatever happened to him happen to Izuku.

“What do we do?” Tomura asked.

“It won’t ever be safe for him if he is with us,” he admitted. “Not with the Doctor and Sensei.”

“Then let’s get rid of them,” Tomura proposed. “I’m tired of Sensei treating me like a pawn, and if he tries to hurt Izuku, I’ll just have to hurt Sensei first.”

“It won’t be that simple,” he reminded him. “He and the Doctor are not just people we can wipe out.”

“Sensei, maybe,” Tomura admitted. “But the Doctor? He would be an easy PK.”

“This is not something we can just rush into, Tomura.”

“It’s not something we wait on, either!”

“What if…” he trailed off, then steeled himself. “What if we had the heroes take him back?”

Immediately, Tomura was against the idea. “What?” he hissed. “We just got him!”

“And we will have him for as long as you would like, but where would be safest? With us, or with the heroes?”

He started to say something but cut himself off, realizing the same thing he had.

If they wanted to effectively destroy Sensei, the Doctor, and the Nomus, Izuku had to be taken away from the equation before he could be used against them. If he stayed with them, there was too great a chance that he could be held hostage or turned into another Nomu.

“We just got him,” Tomura said quietly.

“I know,” Kurogiri agreed.

Izuku was not as fully functional as he first thought.

The doorknob to Tomura’s room was clenched in his fist, a ready weapon. Also, an accidental weapon. Inko’s power hummed under the

skin of his palms and he *shushed* it, spitefully thinking of how the doorknob shot into his hand and nearly made him give away the fact that he was awake.

“Izuku,”

Whirling around, Izuku almost threw the doorknob in frustration as Tomura and Kurogiri appeared. Couldn’t they see that he was trying to *escape?*

“We have a plan.”

Chapter End Notes

thanks for all the kudos and comments!

this is not my way of clearing inko in any way btw. she's still a trash mom

discord

Murphy's Law

Chapter Notes

Thank you for all the kudos and comments

tw- there is some non graphic torture

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Izuku knew that their plan had a few holes. Okay, a *lot* of holes. Some things were hinging on pure luck, which none of them seemed to have in excess. They needed to get rid of All for One and the Doctor, neither of which would be easily done away with. They needed to get the heroes to both the hideout and the nomu factory.

Giving the heroes a tip would be easy enough with Kurogiri. Tomura could kill the Doctor while the heroes attack and, if they were just lucky enough, All Might could take All for One down for them. After that, Izuku would safely be in the heroes' custody and Kurogiri could take himself and Tomura away.

Izuku didn't like that he was so ready to let Tomura kill the Doctor but a small, bitter voice in his head said that he was only getting what he deserved. Who knows how many people he killed to further the Nomu Projects, or how many more people he might kill?

The reasoning didn't quell the uneasiness in his stomach. He was supposed to be a hero. He was going to be a *hero.*

So he was going to let Tomura kill someone for him?

He didn't even *argue.* Izuku just stood there, listening to them say they were going to kill someone.

The worst of it was that Izuku didn't feel guilty about it. He knew someone was going to die and he was okay with it. Relief was one of the first things that he felt when he heard them say they would kill the Doctor. *Relief.*

What kind of person feels relieved when planning a murder?

"Izuku? Are you still with us?" Kurogiri's voice snapped him out of his

reverie, reminding him that he was supposed to be listening to them flatten out a few details.

“Yeah, just, say it again.”

Tomura gave him a skeptical look, stopping Kurogiri from talking. “No, something’s bothering you.” He narrowed his eyes as Izuku tried not to squirm. “Tell us.”

“I-It’s fine,” Izuku insisted, “Really, I-”

“If this is about Ragdoll, I assure you, she will be included in the rescue,” Kurogiri offered gently.

Izuku’s thoughts were abruptly dragged away from the Doctor. “Ragdoll? Why- She’s *here?”* he said hysterically.

“Don’t change the subject,” Tomura scolded, waving off Izuku’s sputtering that *Kurogiri* changed the subject and why was *Ragdoll* here- “You are worried about something. Tell us.”

A minute passed of him and Kurogiri staring Izuku down before he caved.

“Is...Is it wrong that when you said you would kill the Doctor, I felt relieved?” Izuku asked hesitantly, nerves quieting his voice. “I’m supposed to be training to be a hero but I’m somehow okay with you killing someone. I know that he’s done a lot of bad things. To me, to countless other people, but is it okay for me to use that to justify-”

“The Doctor has hurt many people, Izuku,” Kurogiri stated calmly, laying his hand on Izuku’s shoulder. “He hurt you years ago, and he has hurt you again. The relief you may feel is not a sign of your morals crumbling but a reaction based on his actions towards you.”

Kurogiri’s hand tightened. “You are right when you say he has committed horrible acts, some of which you were the victim of. Do not think any less of yourself. A man will die, yes, but he is one that took lives without a second thought.”

“If it makes you feel any better, *I’m* the one that’s gonna kill him, not you,” Tomura chimed in. “And I think we’re all going to be relieved when that bastard is dead.”

Kurogiri nodded. “No more deaths by his hands,”

“No more Nomus,” Izuku agreed.

Tomura introduced him to his new friends.

They did not get off to a good start.

“Surge!” Toga squealed, lunging for him.

The knife she threw at him disappeared through a portal but Izuku still reacted, backpedaling into Tomura, who practically snarled at her.

“What did I say?” he growled, glowering at her with a protective arm around Izuku’s shoulders. “If *any* of you hurt him, you’re dust.”

Dabi gave Izuku an appraising once over. “So, it’s true then. You are working with the League?”

Izuku straightened, jostling his broken arm. “What did you just say?” *It’s true?* What the hell did that mean? “Why would I be working with the League?”

Decidedly confused, the members of the League looked to Tomura for an answer.

“He’s really not,” Tomura said, the words almost regretful. “Why do you think I had you guys kidnap him? He wouldn’t have come here on his own.”

“What a surprise, the media is spouting lies and crackpot theories to the general populace,” Mr. Compress drawled. “At the expense of such a promising young hero, too.”

Izuku shuffled closer to Tomura, beyond confused. “I don’t understand. What’s the media saying about me?”

“They’re calling you a traitor,” Spinner said. “They are saying that you have been conspiring with us to take down hero society.”

“They also spilled information about your past,” Magne said resentfully. “Someone leaked your case file, kid.”

After a minute of thinking, Izuku just sighed. He should have expected

it, honestly. The kid with a weird quirk, questionable history, and ideals, who *wouldn't* target him? "This is why I wanted to stay *out* of the spotlight," he muttered. "But *no,* I had to meet a serial killer."

"Are…" Spinner trailed off, glancing to where Toga was giggling. "Are you talking about Stain?"

"No, I'm talking about the other serial killer I know," Izuku muttered, then bit the inside of his cheek. Izuku thought about it and realized he actually knew a troubling amount of serial killers. Since meeting all of them just now, the number of murderers he knew just increased, too. His gut churned at the realization, but he shoved down his feelings and let out a small sigh.

"Yes," he said, disdain clear in his voice, "I'm talking about Stain."

Their reactions varied from amused to confused to irritated but Izuku really did not care at this point. Stain was trash, through and through. Whether or not Tomura's new gaggle killers agreed was not important.

"Look, I get that you support him or whatever, but I do not particularly value a serial killer's opinion on me."

"You are quite the interesting figure, Surge." Mr. Compress said. "No wonder Stain spoke so highly of you."

Izuku gave him a flat look. "What did I *just* say?"

"Kurogiri," the TV crackled, putting Izuku's mind into danger mode. "Bring me Tomura and his friend."

Any sense of calm was squeezed from his lungs, All for One's voice sending reminders of the pain he experienced when he forced Inko's quirk into Izuku. Tomura's arm tightened around Izuku protectively before he stepped away and nodded at Kurogiri.

In a flurry of darkness and mist, Izuku found himself regaining his balance in a familiar room. All for One was in the same chair as before, facing where Izuku stood alone. Tomura and Kurogiri stood on All for One's side.

"You withstood an additional quirk much better than predicted," All

for One mused. Even without eyes to gaze upon him with, Izuku felt himself being observed by the villain. “I would like to credit the Doctor’s remodeling, but you present so many variables. Your quirk is shrivelled, crowded into a cage it has only just begun to creep out of. Is that why you recovered so quickly? Because there was room that there should not be?”

He doesn’t know, Izuku realized. *He doesn’t know about quirks retaining a piece of their user.*

It made sense, now that Izuku thought about it. Izuku’s quirk made a space inside his head that shouldn’t exist. If All for One didn’t have a quirk that created something similar, and if he had never come across a person for the Nomu Project like Izuku, they would have no idea if vestiges could exist after a quirk left its user. And if there wasn’t space made for a vestige, could one even manifest?

“What if the fact that I gave you your mother’s quirk also played a factor? Could your mother’s DNA have made assimilation easier?” All for One paused. “I seem to have lost track of the conversation at hand. I apologize. Tomura,”

At the sound of his name, he straightened. “Yes, Sensei?”

“What quirk do you believe would complement this Nomu’s existing arsenal?”

Izuku inhaled sharply. No. No, he couldn’t seriously mean to give Izuku another quirk? Even with Inko containing her quirk for him, Izuku still felt like he was only a few meters away from being as loopy and unresponsive as before. He wasn’t meant to handle another quirk. He didn't know if having another one added would fully override his consciousness and he didn’t want to find out.

“Organs don’t weigh that much,” Inko had told him.

Izuku didn't realize he would be putting her advice into practice so soon.

“Sensei?” Tomura said. “I don’t think-”

“I wasn’t thinking about a match when I decided to get rid of his mother’s quirk but thinking about adding something to harmonize his quirks could be useful, wouldn’t you agree?”

“What if he can’t handle another quirk, Sensei?” Tomura asked,

desperation edging into his voice.

All for One's tone turned cold, the smile on his face more unnerving than before. "Your concern is unwarranted, Tomura. All the Nomu subjects' bodies manage to survive another quirk. And your friend's unusual recovery only bolsters my reasoning to give him an additional quirk."

"Those things aren't alive!" Tomura burst. "Sure, they have a pulse, but they *died-"*

"Tomura," All for One growled.

"All for One," Izuku spoke loudly, desperate to turn All for One's attention away from Tomura. "Is that anything like One for All?"

Izuku's whole body trembled as an eerie silence swept the room. All for One slowly turned back to Izuku, no longer smiling.

"What did you say?"

Terror left him unable to speak but All for One had not expected an answer from him. Tendrils shot from his hand and wrapped around Izuku so tightly he could feel his bones grinding together. He pulled Izuku in close, holding him off the ground.

"You know about One for All?"

Fuck, he only meant to distract him, not set off his murder impulse. Izuku nodded, a wheeze getting crushed out of him when the tendrils held him tighter in response.

"Are you…" he trailed off, shaking his head. "No. You are not Nine. I would have felt my brother's power inside you."

Izuku was brought closer. "But you know who is, don't you?" All for One said, a smile stretching across his face again. "Tell me, Nomu, who did All Might pass my brother's power to? Who did entrust his legacy to?"

Oh, this was... *bad.* This was definitely the guy that put All Might through the wringer. What would he do to Mirio, given the opportunity? Izuku couldn't just give him up. Against any of the self-preservation he had learned from his family, Izuku stayed silent as he dangled in All for One's grasp.

“It’s fine that you are not the chatty type,” All for One said. “All of you hero types break the same way, in the end.”

Pain seeped into his bones, invading his system, and Izuku clamped down on the urge to scream.

No matter what All for One did to him, Izuku refused to give up his friend.

Agony mounted inside of him until he could barely manage a coherent thought.

Izuku faintly thought that this was a decent way to die. For a friend.

The pain receded, leaving Izuku shaky.

“Who is Nine?”

Izuku stayed quiet.

The only thing keeping Tomura from lunging at Sensei was the hand Kurogiri had placed on his shoulder.

“Kurogiri,” Sensei said over Izuku’s sounds of pain. “Could you go escort our guests back to their own facility? It seems our deal will be falling through.”

Guests? What guests?

Kurogiri transported them into a different room, where two people resided.

“Dragon, Rappa,” Kurogiri addressed. “The deal is off.”

The man with dark hair shot to his feet, his expression twisting with rage. “You said-”

“Something has come up,” Kurogiri interrupted. “We will contact you if something changes.”

Before they could argue or fight, Kurogiri warped them away.

“Who were those NPCs?” he asked.

“They were members of the Shie Hassaikai, a yakuza organization,” Kurogiri explained, “They struck a bargain with the Doctor. They give us a few more additions to the League in exchange for Izuku.”

“What?” Tomura cried out. “Why didn’t you say anything while we were planning?”

“The details of our negotiations were still being hammered out; by the time the trade would have taken place, we would have already been gone.” Kurogiri sighed. “I did not know Izuku would have information that set Sensei off as he did.”

At the reminder of what Izuku was going through, Tomura felt a familiar rage swarm him. Less familiar but just as warranted, guilt smothered him. Tomura was the reason Izuku was getting hurt again. If he had just found a better way to contact Izuku, none of them would be in this mess.

“You already sent the heroes their clue, right?” Tomura gritted his teeth. Stupid heroes, they should have done their jobs better and kept him away. The win at UA’s summer training camp was pyrrhic. The League had gained reputation points but now Izuku was at risk. He was being hurt and all Tomura could do was wait until those lousy heroes launched their plan.

“Yes,” Kurogiri said. “They should be arriving anytime now.”

Izuku’s nerves screamed at the painful stimulation All for One flooded into him when he refused to answer his questions again. Both of the existing quirks inside of him were useless without mobility or contact, neither of which Izuku possessed.

“I don’t really *need* you to answer me, I suppose,” All for One said, mulling over his options. “That Number One buffoon would probably blurt their name if I riled him up enough.” A tendril slowly curled around his neck. “So, I will ask you *one more time,* Midoriya Izuku.

“Who is Nine?”

The wall exploded.

The tendrils loosened, and Izuku was engulfed in dark mist. He fell into someone’s arms, a gentle grip forming around his overly sensitive

body.

“Are you okay?” Tomura asked urgently. “The Doctor’s been taken care of, the heroes are here, and Ragdoll was returned-”

Izuku used what little strength he had left to press himself into Tomura. His whole body shook violently with tremors, the aftershock of pain needling at his nerves. Tomura’s arms slowly wrapped around him. His touch hurt, the weight of his arms overbearing, but Izuku needed it. He didn’t care that it hurt, only that someone was with him.

“We must move,” Kurogiri said, breaking Izuku’s bubble of safety. “Can you walk?”

Izuku pulled away from Tomura and tried to stand, but it was like he was a baby deer taking its first steps. Tomura simply picked him up and they stepped through another portal. Izuku allowed himself to hang limply in his arms, grateful for the lack of tendrils crushing him. Taking in trembling breaths, Izuku slowly attempted to regain his composure.

“We’re dropping you off at the-”

Black slime burst from Izuku’s mouth, choking him while it enveloped him. He faintly heard Tomura screaming, but the sound vanished as he was spat out onto rubble. Izuku muffled a scream as he skidded across the broken ground. The adrenaline that faded came rushing back into his system. Every movement as he pushed himself to his feet was agony but he managed to gain a brief assessment of the situation before dodging concrete flung by the fight between All Might and All for One. The rest of the League appeared one by one via the black slime. Tomura and Kurogiri appeared last, Tomura violently thrashing against the slime until it fully disappeared.

Their eyes met across the field of destruction and, for a moment, Izuku saw overwhelming relief in his eyes.

Then something wrapped around his midsection and he was yanked off the ground. He flailed and frantically pulled at the thing wrapped around him until Izuku realized how familiar it was.

His body collided with a dark figure and he was being carried far, far away from the League and All for One.

Izuku clung to Aizawa until they stopped, and then he held on tighter with his meager strength.

“Izuku,” Aizawa said softly, his hand carding through Izuku’s sweat-damp hair. He shuddered at the contact, burrowing himself further into Aizawa’s shoulder. “Izuku, I need to know if you’re okay or not.”

“M’ fine,” Izuku said into his jumpsuit. “Jus’ wanna go home.”

And sleep, he amended. He could *really* use some sleep.

Izuku closed his eyes, and let himself drift off.

According to one of the nurses on hand with a particular quirk, Izuku had been tortured. Of course, she hadn’t phrased it like that, but Hitoshi could read between the lines. Technically he shouldn’t be listening to the conversation, but he needed to know what Izuku had gone through. He needed to know how to help him when he woke up.

Hitoshi had been so *useless* the entire time he was gone, and he couldn’t stand it. He could have helped when the League attacked the training camp, but instead, he stayed inside the lodge, waiting for him to return. And while Izuku was in the League’s clutches, he just sat in his room, waiting for news on Izuku’s rescue. Now, Izuku was finally *here* and Hitoshi could find a way to do something other than wait around.

His heart monitor beeped steadily and Hitoshi was reminded of the aftermath of the USJ. Here he was, sitting beside Izuku, listening in on a conversation he wasn’t supposed to hear. It was the middle of the night this time, and he had no doubt the Hatsumes would be arriving soon.

Nearly a week had passed in Izuku’s absence and none of them had fared very well during that time. His classmates were despondent and Hitoshi hadn’t spoken to Mei or her mothers at all. His dads were working themselves to the bone trying to find Izuku.

The officer that leaked Izuku’s information was found and dealt with viciously by Nedzu’s lawyers. Nezu insisted on dealing with all of the rumors regarding Izuku’s position with the League. He ravaged every news station slandering Izuku’s name and pushed out things in support of Izuku’s innocence.

Still, Hitoshi felt like throttling someone, and Shigaraki was high up on that list.

Only Shigaraki and Kurogiri managed to escape Kamino Ward and they were mostly forgotten in the aftermath of All Might's final stand.

The door opened, and his pops stepped inside. The Hatsumes stepped in after him, piling into the room. They greeted each other quietly, then took their places around Izuku. None of them spoke, simply basking in the fact that they had Izuku again. Mitsu and Ayumi stared at Izuku's unconscious body and wept quietly in relief, hugging their daughter between them. Pops put his arm around Hitoshi and released a heavy, shaking sigh, a few stray tears rolling down his face.

Sometime in the morning, his dad entered the room, completing their family reunion.

Hitoshi dozed on Pops' shoulder until the moment Izuku's heart monitor began beeping much faster than before.

They all became alert as Izuku slowly woke up, holding their breaths as he opened his eyes.

"Hi," he said, smiling.

Chapter End Notes

izuku: stain was a murderer, so i don't value his opinion

mr. compress: wow no wonder stain likes you

Izuku: >:(

discord

Reiterations

Chapter Notes

I'm still alive!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Could you repeat that?” Detective Tsukauchi asked. Aizawa was looking at him with disbelief, too.

Izuku shifted in his hospital bed. It was cold here. “I said that Tomura and Kurogiri made a plan with me to get me back to the heroes.” He wondered why that was such an unbelievable thing, considering the Detective finished explaining how he knew about One for All to Izuku just a little bit before he started to question Izuku.

Both of the adults in the room shared a skeptical glance with each other. “But they were the ones to kidnap you in the first place, why would they want to just let you go?”

“Because they didn’t want me to get hurt,” Izuku said. “All for One wanted to keep giving me quirks because of how I adjusted to having Inko’s,” Izuku paused as some of the static in his head increased, as if the quirk heard him talking about it. “I don’t think I would have stayed so sound of mind though.”

“Could you elaborate on the details of the plan you made?”

Izuku did. He told them about the tip given to the police, the Doctor, how things went awry when All for One asked to see them.

“He started asking Tomura what quirk he thought would complement the ones I already had. Of course, I knew that I wouldn’t be able to-to-” he gritted his teeth and tried to steady himself. “Tomura knew it, too. He started arguing with him. All for One was getting mad.”

Izuku started shaking, a sob building in his chest. “I-I didn’t know what else to do! I swear, Detective. But he was going to hurt Tomura and I didn’t know how else to stop him!”

“Haiyama,” he said calmly, “take a deep breath. I’m not going to get angry with you.” Izuku listened, even though his ribs ached with the feeling of his lungs pressing against them, and nodded once he calmed down. “Now, what did you do when he started to get mad?”

“I asked him if All for One was like One for All,” Izuku whispered, looking at his lap instead of at the detective’s face.

“And what happened after that?”

“It worked,” Izuku said, wet chuckles quietly coming out with the words. “He forgot all about Tomura. Started asking me about Nine.”

He knew there were signs of what All for One did to him. His whole body ached from being squeezed and he could see the bruises on his arms. That meant they probably knew, too.

“I didn’t tell him anything,” he said softly, “Not a thing.”

The rest of the questions went by faster after that. Or maybe he was just a little out of it. He made sure to emphasize how much Tomura and Kurogiri helped him anytime they came up. And every time he did, his words made Aizawa and the detective increasingly uncomfortable. He knew that they were still villains and that they had done horrible things, but they weren’t just killers to him. They were the people who cared about him when he needed to be cared for, the people who kept him going for all those lonely years.

Detective Tsukauchi thanked them both and stepped out, Aizawa following him out. Izuku listened to their voices through the wall, their words muffled and lost through the barrier.

Aizawa came back in, taking the spot where Detective Tsukauchi had been sitting.

“When can we go home?” Izuku asked, longing to see the cats again.

Aizawa sighed. “Soon, Izuku. But, first, we need to talk.”

“About what?”

“About Shigaraki and Kurogiri. You know that they are bad people, right?”

Though agreeing gave him a sense of betrayal and the description didn’t really fit to him, Izuku nodded. “I know,”

“And you know that your family does not like them at all because of what they’ve done to you?”

All they’ve-

“They saved me!” Izuku shouted, suddenly furious. “They saved me!”

Aizawa didn’t react to his outburst. “They were the ones who took you in the first place,” he said, “They have been the cause of a lot of your pain.”

“They kept me alive,” Izuku snarled. “Even after they left me alone, they were the reason I kept going for so long.”

“They made you feel like you had to suppress your quirk,” Aizawa argued. “They allowed you to be experimented on.”

“They gave me *hope!”* Izuku shouted, frustrated.

“They kidnapped you twice. They had your mother killed. They hurt you,”

At the mention of Inko, Izuku scowled. “Muscular killed Inko, and if he was ordered to do it, then it wasn’t by Kurogiri. And it wasn’t like Tomura, who was a *kid* at the time, could have done it either.” He thought about the scar on his right shoulder, where Tomura’s hand had pressed into him, leaving him bloody in a fit of rage. “Tomura wanted me to be his friend again, that’s why he kidnapped me.”

“Because he’s a criminal,” Aizawa reminded him. “He had you kidnapped because he is a criminal who has no qualms killing, who tried to kill me and your classmates more than once.”

“I-I know!” Izuku said, tears surfacing. “I know that they aren’t good people. I know that they hurt me and you and that they’ve done things that should never be done. But they were good to me and they helped me find my way here, even if it was just their memory.”

Aizawa gave himself pause, sighing. “What do you mean?”

“I hung out at Dagobah beach for years because I was so desperate to just catch a glimpse of them again. I never would have gotten into building support items if I hadn’t spent so much time just sitting around fiddling with things. I never would have started selling all that junk to the Hatsumes, meaning I would never have met them. And if I didn’t sell all of it, I wouldn’t have gotten the money that I needed for the tuition.

“Maybe I would have found some other way to get in,” Izuku conceded, “But I might not have. And then I never would have met you or pops or Hitoshi. I would still be in that empty apartment,

alone.”

“You can’t give them credit for your happiness,” Aizawa said firmly. “It was your actions that led you here, not theirs.”

“Maybe Kurogiri should have just let me bleed out on that beach,” Izuku said bitterly. “It would have saved us all a lot of trouble.”

“No,” Aizawa snapped, surprising Izuku with his vehemence. “Never think that way. I don’t care how much trouble you are, you being happy and safe in the end is worth every last ounce of stress.”

Aizawa offered his hand and Izuku placed his hand in his dad's palm. They sat in silence for several minutes.

Izuku didn’t like that his thoughts had taken that sort of direction. Thoughts like that had stopped haunting him a few weeks after meeting the Hatsumes, disappearing so long ago that he managed to forget he used to think like that. But here he was, regretting his own happiness because he brought trouble to the people making him think that life had more to it than a goal and getting there.

“UA is implementing a dorm system when all the students come back. It means we’re going to start living on campus,” Aizawa said, “The staff is making rounds to ask for parent permission. I spoke to Ayumi and Mitsu with Hizashi about you, Mei, and Hitoshi’s living situation.”

“But can’t you just give your own permission?” Izuku asked, perplexed. “You’re our dads, aren’t you?”

“Your father and I may be your parents, but that doesn’t mean that we want to just make you move into dorms without providing you with other options. Mitsu and Ayumi have offered their house to you two if you want to step away from UA. There is no pressure to make either choice, we will love you either way.”

“Away from UA?” Izuku said incredulously. “You think Hitoshi and I would ever take that?”

“No,” he said bluntly, “But there’s no sense in not giving you a choice about it.”

Izuku liked having Pull a little more than he anticipated. It was so

useful for the most mundane things. No one looked at him funny for using it, either. No one feared it. No one thought he was a villain for lifting his notebook into a box.

They were finishing packing up all the things they wanted to take with them. The cats were coming with them, thank god. No one in the class had an allergy and Mitsu and Ayumi offered to take them but Izuku knew that they would have killed each other very quickly if they were contained in the same house. The Hatsume house was not a place for pets, and the cats would not have appreciated living with strangers.

They arrived at the dorms early in the morning before everyone else because of their dads' staff positions. Hitoshi and Izuku had rooms right next to each other, which Izuku found reassuring. Izuku and Hitoshi decided to hang out together after they managed to move all their boxes. Hitoshi sat against the headboard of Izuku's bed and Izuku laid on the bed while they talked.

"I'm tired," Izuku yawned. He closed his eyes and made a fake snore.

"Mood," Hitoshi said, "But if you're tired, you should sleep."

Izuku shook his head. "Dad said he wanted to have everyone in class meet up outside the building later."

"I promise you, Dad will not mind you skipping out if you're sleeping."

Izuku hesitated. "Just wake me up when he calls us," he bargained.

"Sleep," Hitoshi said, grabbing one of his many blankets and throwing it over Izuku. The blanket was yellow and had a bunch of chibi Present Mic's yelling or saying "Yeah!". Izuku snuggled into it and closed his eyes.

Izuku jolted awake at a loud thump. Blearily, he fought his way out of his blanket, nearly tripping himself as he stepped away from the bed. He checked the time on the clock by his bed and grumbled to himself as he rubbed at his eyes. Hitoshi had not woken him up.

He left his room and realized that everyone else must be inside their own, decorating and renovating. Izuku walked down the hall until he

reached the door and then he walked around some more. He had no idea who was in which room, so he headed down to the kitchen. There were snacks somewhere and he was going to find them.

Sitting on the counter, Izuku munched on some chips, swinging his legs back and forth. He listened to footsteps come closer and closer until Sato came into view, humming something to himself. Sato stopped dead when he made eye contact with Izuku. Izuku crunched another chip before dusting off his fingers and getting off the counter.

“Hi,” Izuku said when Sato didn’t stop staring at him. “H-”

“Can I hug you?” Sato interrupted, arms twitching as he waited for Izuku’s reply. Izuku nodded and Sato’s large arms enveloped him, his feet left the ground as he stood to his full height with Izuku in his arms. Izuku hugged him back as he dangled.

“You scared us, man,” Sato said quietly.

“Sorry,” Izuku mumbled into his shoulder.

“Not your fault,” Sato said.

Eventually, Izuku’s feet met the ground again and he found out that Sato had come into the kitchen to take stock of the cabinet space and what the appliances were like.

“You should go see Todoroki when you can,” Sato suggested. “He’s been pretty anxious to see you. Not that all of us aren’t, but he was really freaked out when you were gone.”

Guilt crawled over him like a million ants. He should have thought about getting in contact with him! With all of his friends!

“Do you know where his room is?”

Sato paused. “I think so, hold on.”

A few minutes later, Izuku was knocking on what he hoped was Shouto’s dorm room. The noise coming from inside the room stopped and the door opened. Shouto stood completely still as he realized who was in front of him. Izuku offered him a sheepish smile and extended his arms in an invitation. Shouto grabbed one of his arms and pulled him into his room, shaking hands pulling him into a fiercely tight hug as he stepped over the threshold. Izuku pressed back with just as much enthusiasm, shoving down the instinctive panic that the tight

hold brought.

Izuku had so much bad luck when it came to things squeezing him and All for One's chosen method of torture was an added traumatic experience. He ought to have some form of good associating instead of just avoiding it entirely. Like exposure therapy. Because he loved being hugged by the people he loved. The Hatsumes were huggers and though they were being careful with him, that wasn't going to change.

He also knew that Shouto would never hurt him. He was just worried, just happy to see him again. Izuku tried not to think about the time in All for One's clutches when he was robbed of his senses through pain. He had never gotten the chance to think that he might never be able to see his family again. He could barely remember most of the events that took place between his capture and receiving Pull. Things cleared up after his weird mind communication with her but they got fuzzier the closer he came to All for One's questioning.

Still, Izuku knew when to pull away. His nerves were fraying and he had to forcibly calm himself down. Shouto fretted over him but Izuku waved him off.

"I'm fine," he reassured him, "Just a little sore."

Shouto practically forced him to sit down on his bed, muttering about letting himself recover. Izuku took in the half-done transformation of the room, impressed with how much he managed to get done.

"Are you going for a traditional look?" Izuku asked as Shouto wrapped a blanket around his shoulders.

"I suppose," he hummed in response. "This is what my home looks like."

"How did Endeavor take the whole dorm thing?"

Shouto shrugged. "He was more preoccupied with All Might's retirement. He'll never get to beat him now."

Izuku winced. "And you?" He grabbed Shouto's hand, winding their fingers together. "Do you think you'll like the dorms?"

"Yes," he said immediately. "I think I will."

The Hero Commission accelerated their course, saying that their world was going to need more heroes because of All Might's sudden retirement. The provisional license exam was approaching fast so everyone in his class worked hard to advance themselves and come up with special moves.

Izuku had a whole new quirk to deal with and learn about so he had options. One of them involved messing with his glitter gun again so that it could rapidly fire different types of ammo. Another involved learning how to use Inko's quirk like a bullfighter would wave a red cape to guide the bull around. He would pull an object towards him at a high speed and then release it. Of course, he tried to aim it, but he had a lot of bruises from objects just slamming into him. One time, he actually managed to knock himself out.

His body still felt weirdly full all the time, a fog kept at bay by Inko on the edges of his mind, but he was adjusting.

Sometimes, he would just feel out an object to see what he could pull on. A cap on a water bottle, the string of a bag, a screw in the vents, he could pull on them without flinging the whole mass they were connected to at himself.

Mei and him had fun with that, testing out what he could accomplish with his quirk. Their parents kept suggesting they take up the help of a quirk counselor but then they might have to worry about things like *safety* and *laws,* so they decided against that.

Izuku was also certain that Mei injected a tracker into him at some point, but, whatever.

Yagi asked for a private meeting after heroics class ended and Izuku agreed hesitantly. Detective Tsukauchi probably told him about what transpired between him and All for One and Yagi wanted to talk about it. What there was to say, Izuku didn't know. Was he going to get scolded for using One for All as a diversion? For putting Mirio at risk?

They sat across from each other, their tea cooling on the table between them.

Yagi cleared his throat, then stood and bowed deeply. "I wanted to say thank you."

Izuku blue screened, blindsided by the sheer amount of gratitude Yagi was exuding.

At his silence, Yagi simply continued, guilt dripping from every word. “Detective Tsukauchi told me what you did for Young Mirio. Thank you for protecting him, even when you were faced with such a formidable enemy.”

“Did you know he was alive?” Izuku blurted, a burning question begging for the right answer. “All for One,” he clarified as Yagi rose, “Did you know he was alive when you gave Mirio One for All?”

Say no, he asked silently. *Please say no.*

Yagi hurried to reply, panic flashing across his face. “No, I assure you, I thought I had killed him,” he frowned, taking his seat again. “I promised myself long ago that I would be the last user to have to face him.”

“Thank god,” Izuku said, deflating against the couch. “How is Mirio, anyway?”

Yagi brightened, starting to talk about his successor’s training and improvements with One for All and Permeation. Izuku listened, glad that Mirio was doing so well.

Yagi paused in his rambling, a more serious expression forming. “Do you plan to tell Young Mirio?”

Izuku shook his head. “I have nightmares about it, I don’t see why I should unload all that onto Mirio.”

“My boy,” he started, then cut himself off. “He would want to know,” he said. “It’s your choice, of course, but… he would want to know.”

The exam was finally here. The air in the bus vibrated with his class’s energy, nervous or otherwise. Today they would see if they were up to snuff, if their training paid off.

When they arrived and stepped out of the bus, students from other schools were greeting them almost immediately.

One kid from Ketsubutsu zeroed in on Izuku and stepped into Izuku’s space, grabbing his hands. He said something but it was drowned out by the feeling of his hands around Izuku’s. He hated it. He *hated* it. They squeezed tighter, he leaned in closer. Izuku wanted him to go

away. He wanted him to stop doing this to him.

His hands were released and Izuku's head cleared somewhat. He glanced to his sides, unable to look at Shindo without making the shaking in his hands worse. What he saw made the shaking nearly vanish. Behind him, standing firm and looking like nightmares in their school uniforms, were his classmates. If looks could kill, Shindo would be dead nineteen times over. Yaoyorozu stepped forward and somewhat in front of Izuku, glaring fiercely at the students that were looking in their direction, their gazes drawn by the sheer amount of intimidation his classmates managed to amass.

"Woah, what's the big deal?" Shindo said, still playing nice, "I just wanted to give you all a warm welcome!"

"Touch him again," Yaoyorozu began, the ice in her voice practically causing a chill, "And we will give you a welcome of our own."

By the time Shindo had the sense to back off, Izuku had been shuffled into the middle of their class pack. Aizawa stepped out of the bus, took one look at them, and then turned to Tsuyu. Yaoyorozu was still preoccupied, focussing on drilling holes into the backs of peoples' heads with her eyes. A particularly large student from Shikestu looked like he was going to get too close and his classmates managed to sway his judgment, the combined power of their gazes apparently too menacing to brave.

"Just being friendly, ribbit."

Aizawa grinned in answer, all teeth, and tired eyes.

Izuku didn't know what the "crushing of UA" was, but he felt like the name was pretty self-explanatory.

Izuku's head ached. Inko's power took a toll on his brain, not unlike the times he overused his quirk. Those who passed had moved onto the rescue portion of the exam, and he worked tirelessly with his classmates and the other students to get the civilians to the safe zone. Izuku volunteered to go deeper into the city ruins and searched for civilians using his Sight.

He just finished checking over two of the civilians when a cry for help came from another street over. Turning to the pair in front of him, Izuku pointed them towards the safe zone. “Neither of you have serious injuries that impair you. The safe zone is that way, can you make it there on your own?”

As soon as they said yes, he was off, vaulting over broken pieces of the street and towards the source of the screams. An aura lay in the back of an alley, the actual person obscured by light. Izuku approached quickly and knelt beside the small figure lying in the corner. He was small like the rest of the acting civilians but he looked completely different in terms of appearance. His body was completely covered in some sort of black suit, a white mask covering his face.

“Are you alright?”

The person turned over, revealing a bird-like face as the mask’s design. “Surge,” he said, an odd bit of glee in his voice. He shifted quickly, injecting something small into himself. Izuku caught a glimpse of red before he refocussed his attention.

“Yeah!” Izuku said, “And I’m here to help. Are you hurt anywhere?”

The person… disappeared. What? No, he had melted in the ground?

The ground rolled underneath him, knocking him off his feet. Was this part of the test?

“Your father has been waiting, Midoriya,” the man told him. The way the ground was moving changed, leaving him to crash into a wall headfirst. Izuku lost his meager breakfast as he tumbled constantly, knocking his head into the walls. Midoriya, he said. *Midoriya.* This was not part of the test. This was a villain.

In a moment of balance, Izuku managed to fire a flare. In the next moment, his hand cracked against the wall, sending his gun flying and breaking something in his hand.

“Don’t worry, Midoriya,” said a voice from nowhere. It came from the walls as they closed in around him, the floor as it threw him off balance constantly, disorienting him. “We are going to cure you soon.”

Shouto was about to attack Gang Orca when he saw it. A green flare

lit up the sky, shot from somewhere inside the city. Izuku. It was the same flare he sent up when Stain was about to kill Iida and Native.

Without a thought for what might happen to his score by leaving Gale Force to deal with Gang Orca on his own, Shouto was skating into the city.

“Todoroki!” He turned at the sound of Iida’s voice. He was rushing with the same urgency as Shouto was.

“You saw it, too?” he asked, scanning every inch they passed for any sign of Izuku.

“I did,” he said. “He wouldn’t have sent that up without proper reason!”

They turned a corner and felt tremors in the ground. Sharing a glance, they both increased their speeds.

“You’re faster!” Shouto said, “Go ahead, I’ll catch up.”

Recipro Extending away, Shouto was about to follow when he saw Izuku’s gun. The firearm was laying in an oddly deformed alley. Now that he was looking, the whole street seemed oddly deformed. The rubble was different, like it had been rearranged somehow. Shouto followed the pattern down the following streets, the tremors in the ground elevating.

All of the tremors stopped.

Shouto found Iida kneeling beside Izuku, frantically saying his name as he took stock of his injuries. He knelt down on Izuku’s other side, taking inventory of the odd angles his hand was making, the blood oozing down his face, the remains of vomit around his mouth.

“What happened?” Iida asked, frowning in his anger, “Is there another villain in the area, like Gang Orca?”

At his words, Shouto stood and scanned the area. Aside from the way the ground was formed, nothing else was off. No one was approaching them or fighting them. It was as if they decided to just beat Izuku and leave.

They stood there for another minute before the end of the exam was announced.

As Iida rushed Izuku away to find an infirmary but Shouto made his way back to Gang Orca, seething with rage. He almost knocked into him when he caught up to him.

“How is beating someone senseless part of a test?” he snarled. “Who was it? Which hero?” A test. They beat his best friend for the sake of a test. Maybe this was supposed to be realistic, maybe they were supposed to act their parts as villains but why would they only target Izuku? Why go after him so viciously?

Gang Orca startled at his anger, surprise filtering into his expression. “What?”

“Which hero decided it was okay to beat my friend up until he passed out?” Shouto snapped, his jaw hurting with how hard he ground his teeth. “I don’t see how that can be productive for anyone!”

“Where was he?”

“He was alone! He was one the outskirts of the ruins, rescuing the civilians-”

“No one should have been out there,” he muttered. Gang Orca shouted to get his sidekicks’ attention. “Everyone, I need a sweep of the area! Possible intruders on site!”

Shouto blinked as the sidekicks snapped into action, forming groups and running back out into the ruins. Gang Orca turned back to him, putting his large fin-like hands on Shouto’s shoulders.

“Do you have any more details about what happened?”

“No,” he shook his head. “When we found him he was already out cold. No one else was around.”

“The flare that you ran to,” he started, nodding in the direction where Izuku’s flare flew into the sky. “Was that him?”

“Yes,”

“Alright, go find your friend.” He paused. “Ignore the test scores for now.”

Oh, right. He probably failed after they saw him abandon that boy while fighting Gang Orca.

Shouto made his way through the throng of students, eventually being

pointed to the infirmary. Large as it was, he was still able to pick out the small group of people around Izuku's bed. Yamazawa's bright hair, Aizawa's dark attire, Iida's broad form.

"Iida told us what happened," Aizawa said when he stopped at Izuku's bedside. "No villains or civilians had been placed in that area of the ruins."

The implications hung heavily in the air. If there wasn't anyone meant to be there, that meant a real villain managed to sneak in. Into a facility crawling with heroes and alike.

"Will he be okay?" Shouto said, not knowing what else to ask.

Yamazawa nodded, his frown a harsh, bitter thing. "They say he's got a concussion, bruises, and some broken bones. No permanent damage."

Shouto scowled. It didn't matter that none of his injuries would heal, what mattered was that he got them in the first place. He should have been worrying about passing an exam, not fighting for his life.

His classmates were congregated by the bus when they arrived, lively and exuberant brandishing their provisional licenses in their hands. Their energy quickly dissipated as Aizawa explained the situation. They all boarded the bus, feeling incomplete without Izuku in his rightful place beside them. Yamazawa would stay behind with him in the infirmary, waiting until Present Mic arrived to take them both back to the dorms.

Somber and agitated, Shouto waited in the common room until Yamazawa and Izuku walked in. During that time, one of the cats crawled into his lap. Late as it was, Shouto had to turn on the lamp that was nearby for them to notice him in the dark room.

"I've been expecting you," he said, petting the cat's head as he turned on the lamp.

Yamazawa shrieked, jumping into the air. Izuku was bandaged and exhausted but he still managed to double over in wheezing laughter.

Shouto looked between them; Yamazawa clutching his shirt as he regained his calm and Izuku pressing the hand in a cast to his face, still shaking with laughter.

"What?"

“You’re too good,” Izuku said, plopping down beside him. “Hi, Tora,” he scratched behind the cat’s ears, earning a purr. Shouto opened his mouth to ask for more details but Yamazawa caught his gaze and shook his head slowly as Izuku leaned into his side, sinking into the couch beside him. *Later,* he mouthed. Shouto nodded.

“You failed, by the way,” Yamazawa informed him. “That blonde guy said we should tell you.”

“That’s fine,” he said. And he meant it. Izuku’s wellbeing was far more important than acquiring a fancy piece of plastic. He could go to the remedial classes in the coming months.

“Sorry,” Izuku muttered against his shoulder.

“For getting attacked?” Shouto asked.

“No, for-” Izuku huffed. “For making you fail,” he clarified.

Yamazawa looked like he had something to say about that but Shouto said something before he could. “I can pass the test later,” he assured him. “But, to be clear, I would gladly fail it again if it meant your safety.”

Izuku pressed his face into Shouto’s shoulder and made a strangled sound before sitting up and clearing his throat. “I’m- uh, I’m going to bed.”

As he walked out of the room Yamazawa smirked. “You’d ‘gladly fail it again’, huh?” he said before walking away, too.

Yes? That’s what he said, wasn’t it? Maybe he should go find Izuku and say it again, just to be sure he understood.

Chapter End Notes

I love all of your wonderful kudos and comments, you absolute angels

Izuku STILL can't handle eye contact

Chapter Notes

> Howdy! I carved out some time to write and I finally have something for you lovelies

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I’m getting real tired of this,” Izuku said as the machines around him beeped shrilly, making his headache worse. Another day, another hospital, it seemed. What happened this time? Run it by him again? Weren’t they supposed to be getting ready for the second part of the exam?

“You and me both,” Shinso responded, not needing Izuku to clarify what he meant. “The HPSC sends their regards. And a terrible gift basket.”

“What does it have in it?”

“Lots of things, like a rulebook for hero-ly conduct, a book on villain origins, “How to Handle a Crowd”.” He paused, grabbing one and then brandishing it to Izuku, smiling, “Oh, and let’s not forget, “Fighting the Evil Within”. What a load of crap.”

“Man, they were kind of on the nose with that one,”

“I know! If they want to tell you they’re worried about a change in your career path, I feel like there are more subtle ways to go about it.”

“Is there any food? Sweets?”

“No, they conned us. Gave us a damn library and called it a day.”

“Not even a protein bar or something?” Hitoshi shook his head. Izuku clicked his tongue, “Cheapskates,”

“I’m here!” Yamada shouted, startling Izuku with how loud and frantic he was. “I’m here! Oh my god, Izuku! Your face!”

“I know, I’m gorgeous.” He tried to flip his hair with his hand but quickly realized his hand was in a cast and settled for simply continuing the motion.

“What happened?”

Izuku looked to Hitoshi, who he found staring at him imploringly. “What?”

“We don’t really know what happened, they just found him all beat up.” Hitoshi looked back at Izuku, “We were hoping you would be able to tell us.”

“Oh,” Izuku said. “Uh, I don’t know? I don’t actually remember much after the point that they released us into the second part of the exam.”

“Nothing?” Yamada asked.

Izuku shook his head.

They left shortly after Yamada spoke with some of the employees and Izuku was falling asleep on Hitoshi’s shoulder on the way back to the dorms. Finding Shouto still awake with Tora in his lap was a pleasant surprise. Curling up on his warm half had only served to make him more sleepy. Shouto managed to wake him up though, flustering him and reminding him that he should probably go to bed.

Izuku stared at the ceiling, eyes refusing to stay closed. His body ached from his injuries and whatever medication they dosed him with in the infirmary was started to wear off. He sighed and prepared for a long night.

Izuku was going to intern with Nighteye. Work studies were coming up and Nighteye invited him to his agency through Mirio again. When he arrived at Nighteye’s agency, he explained that he wanted to give Izuku a proper experience in how an agency is run. Izuku agreed, partially because he didn’t know who to trust in the hero industry and he didn’t want to be doxxed again.

His skin crawled when he stood too close to Mirio. All for One’s voice slithered through his head and phantom tendrils wrapped around his body as he whispered his question.

Who is Nine?

Izuku wanted it to be over. He wanted to be able to talk to Mirio without all the stupid baggage he had making his hands shake.

Logically, he knew that All for One was not going to just pop out of the shadows and kill them, but paranoia kept him on edge. What if someone figured out who Mirio was through their interactions and told All for One? What if he wasn't being inconspicuous enough? Was it even right of him to be near Mirio since All for One knew about his connection to Nine?

Izuku shook himself, clenching his jaw. He wanted to be Mirio's friend. All for One was in Tartarus. The League basically dissolved and the residual cronies were being hunted down. He *knew* that.

So why couldn't he look Mirio in the eyes?

When Izuku stepped out of the car and closed the door, Hitoshi made an offended noise and got out, too.

"You're coming inside?" Izuku said curiously, trying to think of a reason he would want to come inside Nighteye's agency. When he got in the car with Izuku, he just thought that he was seeing him off like Aizawa was.

"Well, yeah," he said dryly. "I'm going to ask to be one of his work study students."

"What?" Izuku shouted in excitement. "Really?"

"Wouldn't be here if I didn't plan on it," he flicked Izuku on the forehead, a cheeky smile on his face. "Plus, who knows what kind of trouble you'll get into if I'm not around?"

Izuku pouted. "Don't be mean,"

They waved goodbye to Aizawa and walked into the agency. The nervousness building at the thought of interacting with Mirio more often dissipated as Hitoshi's presence inserted itself into the scenarios he imagined.

Nighteye raised an eyebrow when they both stepped into his office.

"Yamazawa," he said.

"I'd like to put in a request for a work study in your agency," Hitoshi said, straight to the point.

"Do you have the form?"

He saw Hitoshi keep himself from scoffing. As if he would forget the

form. They both handed him their papers and Nighteye stamped them. Izuku wasn't entirely sure if he stamped Hitoshi's because he genuinely thought he would be a good addition to the team and actually mentor Hitoshi or if he was still trying to get on his family's good side.

Izuku was ecstatic either way.

"You're coming with me!" Izuku said for what must have been the tenth time.

"Yup," Hitoshi responded, "I'm going with you."

The first few hours of their first official day as work study students flew by until Nighteye called them in to tell them about their patrols. They were doing surveillance, watching out for the young leader of the Shie Hassaikai. Sir Nighteye pulled him aside when Bubble Girl and Hitoshi left.

"There are rumors circulating that they made contact with the League during your time in their clutches," he pursed his lips, watching Izuku carefully as he said, "We also have evidence that your father is an important member of the Shie Hassaikai."

"Could you go escort our guests back to their own facility? It seems our deal will be falling through."

Izuku blinked once. Twice. The weird sensation disappeared. "That's… not good."

"Mirio will be showing you the ropes of patrolling," Nighteye said slowly, still eyeing Izuku warily. "Go on,"

Their patrol started and Izuku gladly used Hitoshi as a buffer between himself and Mirio. They were entirely different people, but Hitoshi kept up banter with Mirio well enough that Izuku barely needed to chime in.

His father was part of the group they were investigating. A major player in the yakuza. That was where he went off to? He joined a gang? Strange emptiness filled his head as he thought back to all those times Inko would come back from her little trips with scorch marks on her things and alcohol on her breath. She had probably known. Those pockets of time that she left were for visiting him, weren't they? Did she just wait for him to call her and go running?

“Your father has been waiting, Midoriya,”

They all patrolled. They were sometimes stopped by fans or minor crimes but nothing outlandishly terrible happened to anyone so Izuku took it as a win. They regrouped at the agency and the day ended. Mirio tried to make conversation with Izuku but by then Hitoshi had figured out that Izuku was avoiding speaking directly to Mirio and actively standing between any real conversation between them.

Mirio stopped him before he and Hitoshi could walk to their dorm building. “Haiyama, do you have a minute?”

Izuku couldn’t break eye contact fast enough to formulate an excuse and ended up nodding. Mirio beamed and Izuku felt his heart banging against his rib cage. With blood roaring in his ears, Izuku followed Mirio off to the side, hoping that his friend couldn’t hear how hard his heart was pounding. He could barely breathe while staring at his shoes, listening to Mirio saying something to him. If he looked him in the eye, would he stop breathing entirely? His chest tightened, reminiscent of All for One’s suffocating grip.

“-I just want you to know that I’m here for you, okay?”

Izuku blinked, finding himself back in the present. “Th-Thank you.” he said, continuing to keep his gaze locked to the ground.

Still, he could hear Mirio’s smile in his voice when he said, “Of course!”

Inside the dorms, inside his room, Izuku curled into the mass of blankets on his bed. Sweltering in the heat he amassed, Izuku stayed put. Sweat clung to his sheets and his skin but he didn’t move other than to press further into his blankets. He sucked in quick breaths, tears gathering in the corners of his eyes as he tried to stuff all his panic into a box.

I’m here for you, Mirio said. His words made Izuku shutter because he couldn’t even think about him without working himself into a panic attack. Izuku scratched at his skin, anger racing through him like a fire. Why couldn’t everything just go back to normal? Why did he have to be like this now?

“All for One is gone,” Izuku muttered to himself in the quiet of his room, gasping between words. “All for One is gone. He’s *gone.”*

But the number of times he said it didn’t change anything in the end.

No matter what he did, in these moments, he was always suffocating. Struggling to find air like he was still trapped in All for One's clutches.

Like he never left.

Izuku threw his blankets off of himself. Tried to, anyway. Everything was pressing *in* and he bit his lip to cut off a frustrated, panicked noise that no one needed to hear. He fought against the sheets he wrapped himself in and fell off the bed with a thud as he escaped. Cold air prickled his whole body, his sweat only making him colder with each passing second. He stood on wobbling knees and left his room on unsure feet.

His thoughts realigned and Izuku found himself in front of a door with his knuckles pressed to the door as if he knocked.

The door opened and Shouto stood across the threshold. Evidently, Izuku had knocked.

"Izuku?" Shouto said quietly.

Izuku made a short sound in the back of his throat instead of the words he tried to say. Sorry for waking you up. Sorry for being so needy. Sorry I can't handle this alone. Instead came some small, pathetic noise that had Shouto reaching for him in the next second.

"Are you okay with touch?" he asked. Izuku nodded and he pulled him into his room by his hand. He laid on Shouto's futon and Izuku leaned into Shouto the moment he settled in beside him.

"Do you just want to sleep?" *Or do you want to talk?*

Izuku shifted further into Shouto's space, reveling in how pleasant his temperature was. When he didn't answer, Shouto just put his right arm over Izuku's body and pulled him closer.

As Izuku finally drifted into something more peaceful than panicked, he heard Shouto say something. He didn't quite catch it.

"Thank you for trusting me,"

Ayumi raised her eyebrows at Mitsu. *"I want you to say that again. Very carefully."*

Mitsu glanced at her wife, lost, and did as told. “I was looking for the order to fix the ice melting thingamajig in the warehouse and-” She stopped, looking even more confused. “Why was I looking in the warehouse? It would be in the garage, not the warehouse.”

Ayumi nodded and returned to her meal, satisfied, while Mitsu groaned and leaned her head on her hand.

“I run a business,” she said exasperatedly, “And I can’t even remember how we organized our products.”

“That’s why Ayumi handles the books, darling,” Grandma said, giving her consoling back pats. “She isn’t as enthralled by the mechanics and can remember things while you and Mei drive your competitors crazy.”

Mitsu’s parents had come to visit after everything had calmed down. They were staying at the house and had recently gotten permission to take Izuku and Mei out for the night, provided they had a hero escort. Aizawa declined his grandfather’s invitation to eat with them, preferring to remain undistracted and stealthy while they enjoyed the evening.

Izuku rambled on about his new work study and Mei boasted her inventions proudly.

“You should have seen his face when my baby did exactly what I said it’d do!” The “him” being Mei’s current supervisor at her own internship. “And it didn’t even sputter! HA! He thought it was going to explode in his face but NO- I’m the best and-”

“Well, you did say it had a 63% chance of overheating and-”

Mei’s hand thrust out and hit him in the face without her even glancing at him. “I’m the best!” she declared as he removed her hand from his face.

Dinner carried on without a hitch. The restaurant was too fancy for Izuku to be there, honestly, but his family ignored any sense of decorum that was appropriate for a place like this, so he didn’t feel too out of place following their example. People looked at them funny but they looked at *all* of them funny so Izuku could find humor in it.

Grandpa held the door open for all of them to exit, some leftovers in their hands as they continued to chatter and laugh together. They all piled into the car, things quieting a bit as a lull in conversation rolled

into a comforting silence.

“You all okay back there?” Grandma asked, turning in her seat to look back at them. Izuku was sitting on the floor and the rest of them were all being crammed onto the backseat. Ayumi and Mitsu were rather large, though Ayumi was definitely taking up more space, and it didn’t help that the car wasn’t made without Mei’s flailing gestures in mind. Izuku had to dodge a few times to avoid getting smacked in the face again. “We can throw Mitsu in the trunk if you need more room.”

Ayumi made an odd sound, her version of a stifled laugh, as Mitsu scoffed offendedly.

“Betrayed by my own mother,” she lamented, “Laughed at by my wife and children. How will I-”

The ground rumbled, rocking the car. Other drivers around them were just as shocked, muffled shrieks coming from the inside of other cars. Tires screeched on the asphalt and horns blared but Izuku was preoccupied with the light and smoke coming from somewhere far away. Had that been an explosion?

Aizawa knocked on Granpda’s window and all of them screamed.

“Jesus, kid! You’ll give us a heart attack!” he berated, scowling at Aizawa. “Go on, what do you want?”

“Just making sure you’re all fine. Drive straight to UA,”

“Yeah, yeah,” he grumbled, rolling up his window. “Looks like we’re cutting tonight short.” he said to the rest of them. Izuku’s shoulders slumped and he didn’t see Mei’s hand before it hit him in the face as she used him as a – to get closer to their grandparents.

“You can just come into UA with us!” she suggested. “I can show you all of my babies! I have loads of them to show you- I bet half of them won’t explode!”

“Won’t it be a bit late?” Mitsu asked, glancing at her phone. “Will your teachers even let us into the Support building?”

“Doesn’t matter!” Mei said confidently, sinking back into her original place squished between her parents. Preening, she smirked, “I stole Majima-sensei’s keys.”

“Hatsume Mei!” Mitsu shouted indignantly, swatting at her. Grandma

just started cackling. She had an old witch/evil lady laugh that always set off Izuku, so naturally, he burst into a fit of giggles.

“Why would you do that?” she despaired.

"I need to get in there sometimes!”

“And it can’t wait until morning?”

“No!”

Izuku had psyched himself out for today’s patrol with Mirio. He was going to hold a conversation with him. He would! Hitoshi knew about the plan and would be there in case Izuku messed up. But he wouldn’t! He was going to look Mirio in the eye and actually talk and, and-

“Izuku, Yamazawa!”

Oh *no.*

It’s all good. He’s chill. No panic, just saying hi to a friend.

“Mirio!” his voice cracked horribly.

This is it. This is where he dies. He’s dead. Here lies Haiyama Izuku, who died because he can’t handle eye contact.

Mirio’s face looked just the same as the last time he looked at it, but upon Izuku’s call he brightened frighteningly fast. It would have been cute if he hadn’t run over to them with the speed of a race car.

“Ready for patrol?”

Izuku made an odd sound he was never going to address as he nodded his head. Mirio didn’t seem to care, only smiling wider at Izuku’s response. Hitoshi hid a *rude* laugh behind a cough and they went on their merry way. Mirio kept saying things to Izuku, who responded *horribly* each time but Mirio couldn’t care less apparently.

“And Hado was bugging Amajiki about practicing his people skills after class but he still so nervous-”

The whole patrol went by and at the end Izuku’s nerves were fried.

Hella crispy. Nothing left there but ashes, really. Mirio, aka the Best Person Ever, seemed to notice Izuku's weariness and toned down his enthusiastic remarks. They made it inside the locker room and Izuku was ready to splat on the floor like a cold, uncooked tortilla when his phone buzzed halfway through changing out of his costume.

One of the news apps was doing a report on the buildings that were destroyed in fires. One of them had been the one they heard going up in flames on their way back from dinner but the other two were from much less fancy districts, according to the article he was reading. Oh, the address to one of the buildings was actually sort of… familiar…

Was that his old apartment complex?

Izuku rubbed his eyes and reread the address. Aw hell, it was! Three buildings go out in the whole of japan and one of 'em was one he used to live in. Goddamnit, this better not be- Nope, Izuku told himself, sighing tragically. If this didn't turn out to be something that made him want to tear his hair out, he would volunteer to be Mei's test subject. For a year.

Wait, no. That might *actually* kill him. He'd volunteer for… a week.

Izuku could bring it up with Aizawa later, but for now he just wanted to collapse in his bed -or maybe Shouto's- and sleep away the twitchiness rolling in his skin.

"Dekiru, Yamazawa!" Uraraka smiled at the sight of them from down the path. She and Tsuyu sped up to catch up to them on their way into the 1-A building. They usually saw each other coming back from work studies, sometimes catching Yaoyorozu and Kirishima on their way back from Fatgum, too.

"Man, I'm beat," Uraraka said, "I can't wait to eat whatever Sato made for dinner."

"Sato cooked?" Hitoshi was quick to ask. Izuku brightened at the comment, too. Eating Sato's cooking whenever it was his turn to coordinate a meal was always a good way to end a day.

"He could just make us rice and still think it'd be the best thing I've ever tasted," Uraraka sighed dreamily.

"It's because he's an angel," Izuku said, just as starry-eyed. They all broke out into quiet laughter at their own silliness and entered the dorms.

True to their hopes, Sato had cooked a wonderful meal for all of them to enjoy. Izuku just about cried when he took a bite, still scorned from Kaminari's failed attempts at putting together a meal. They didn't have someone plan out a meal every night but even with time and assistance, mostly from Ashido and Yaoyorozu, Kaminari still managed to make something that got them banned from the kitchen entirely. Of course, Izuku didn't think Ashido or Yaoyorozu had any real idea about cooking. He passed by the kitchen when their disaster meal was being made and Ashido seemed to rely mostly on unhoned instincts and Yaoyorozu was a rich kid that didn't quite know her way around the kitchen. Kaminari was just trying to make everything at once and it did not work out.

Izuku wandered to Shouto's door, pleasantly full and dead on his feet, and was pulled into one of the most comforting embraces ever the moment he stepped inside. Izuku melted against Shouto and curled his arms gently to return the hug.

"How was your day?" Izuku mumbled into his shoulder.

"The kids called me five peepee man today," he grumbled. "But I think it was okay."

Izuku laughed, pulling them down to get settled under the blankets. "I actually spoke to Mirio a little bit," he confessed, half mortified, "I sounded like a dying cat each time though."

"Oh? That's good. The talking part," Shouto said, "Not the dying cat part."

He didn't know everything about why Izuku was apprehensive about talking to Mirio but he knew enough to be proud of his progress.

"Bakugo's actually acting mature," he said, pulling a surprised noise out of Izuku. "I know. I think he might've noticed that the bratty ones act like him."

Izuku snickered, looking at Shouto warmly. "What, he didn't already know he had the temperament of a grade-schooler?"

"Guess not," Shouto shrugged.

"How-How's he doing? Bakugo?" Izuku clarified. He hadn't heard diddly squat about Bakugo in weeks and it was kind of weird. Not particularly bad, just weird.

“He’s quieter,” Shouto said, “Like he’s thinking about things more than before. He still yells and curses but I think getting kicked out of 1-A really woke him up.”

“Good,” Izuku said. He better be ‘waking up’ after Izuku stopped Aizawa from expelling him.

“Lights out?” Shouto yawned into the lull of their conversation.

“Lights out,” Izuku nodded.

“Repeat the plan again, Eri.”

“I’m going to ask him for help,” she recited carefully. “I’m going to look scared and say that I need him to follow me.”

“Alone,” he snapped, “He needs to follow you *alone.”*

“Alone,” she repeated, “I’ll get him to follow me alone. And-”

“And?” he grunted impatiently, uncaring of how she flinched at his tone.

“And then you’ll trap him,” she said, her voice quieting. “And we’ll bring him back with us.”

He slammed the door behind him when he left. The quiet in her room left too much space for her thoughts to run wild. She wondered why this person mattered so much. Why she needed to be a part of this plan. Would he be as kind as they assumed, not giving question to whether or not he would help her? Would he know if something was off? Should she try and run, now that she’s been given a chance? Would this be another reason for Chisaki to call her a curse, purposefully dragging someone else into her world of nightmares?

Would he be right in calling her an abomination, if she hoped this stranger was kind and helpful?

Would he be right if she hoped she could finally not be alone?

Eri just clutched at her blanket tighter and shut out the questions, counting the stray threads in her blanket until her eyes drooped.

1…2…3…4…

It was awful of her, but she hoped Dragon-san's plan worked. Maybe she wouldn't be so lonely if he still liked her after he found out she tricked him.

Or maybe he would hate her.

She would find out tomorrow.

Chapter End Notes

I hope that was ominous enough for ya

Thanks for your kudos and comments

Mama Bear

Chapter Notes

> tw for past abuse and an abuser trying to justify the abuse to their victim

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“MeiMei, I swear to god-”

“I’m the only god here, Zuzu!” Mei cackled. Izuku watched in morbid fascination as the exo-skeleton powered up and Mei stood. She was almost as tall as the room and when she hit their table by accident, it went flying. They were inside one of the gyms, no adults in sight, and Izuku should have tried to get a straight answer out of Mei before agreeing to a demonstration.

“This is your big project?” Izuku yelped, scrambling out of the way as one of the clunky limbs swung at him as Mei turned to face him.

“Yeah!” She grinned.

“You almost can’t see the crazy in her eyes when she’s that far up there,” Hitoshi said, drinking his coffee from a safer distance. “What’d she say the chance of this exploding was?”

“Only 15%,” Izuku yelled, dodging another limb and hastily joining Hitoshi to stand far, far away.

“Oh, *only 15%,* ” Hitoshi mocked, before shouting, “Good job, Mei! Your chances of blowing up are a lot lower than I thought they were!”

“I know!” she laughed.

Oh, to be a mad scientist, Izuku thought.

Quieter, Hitoshi nudged him with his elbow. “You gonna be good for patrol later today?” he asked. “I know Mirio asked to meet up with you today. Are you gonna be cool with a one-on-one?”

Izuku wasn’t totally sure they were going to talk alone, considering the room Mirio told him to meet inside was Sir Nighteye’s office, but Izuku nodded. “I’ll manage,” he said confidently. Hitoshi didn’t exactly know *why* Izuku suddenly had such a problem talking with

Mirio but he hadn't inquired beyond a few searching glances and assurances that Izuku could lean on him. One for All wasn't a topic he could really broach with him, but his words comforted Izuku all the same.

Mei shook the ground with a few hard stomps.

"Should we get her out of there?" Izuku asked.

One of the joints smoked as she moved.

"Yep," Hitoshi said, setting down his coffee.

Izuku stepped into the office, Sir holding the door, and was surprised to see Yagi in the room, too.

"Young Haiyama," Yagi said cheerfully, "It's good to see you!"

"It's nice to see you, too," Izuku smiled. "Do you know what Mirio wants to talk about?"

Yagi shook his head. "I'm afraid not. He was quite secretive about the topic, but I believe it has to do with One for All, considering all of our presences."

Mirio joined them shortly, declining the tea Yagi sat out for them. Izuku sipped his tea quietly as he greeted them. Judging by the calm carefully sewn into Mirio's tone, they were in for a serious discussion. Mirio took a deep breath and glanced between the two of them.

"I want to know about All for One."

Izuku's grip on the teacup went white-knuckled, any tranquility zapped from his body and replaced with cold terror.

"I'm part of a bloody legacy," Mirio continued. "His organization kidnapped Izuku and he was strong enough to completely drain you, All Might. He's killed all the holders of One for All but us. I want to know our enemy."

It wasn't an unreasonable request, Izuku told himself. He wasn't asking to meet the monster, he just wanted to know about his shitty psyche. Everyone present had a good idea of who All for One was and could give him a profile fitting the kinds of horrors rolling around in

his potato head.

Yagi seemed to be of the same mind, nodding seriously. “I fought him with the intention of making sure you would never have to meet him but I will tell you what I know.”

Yagi started painting a gruesome picture, detailing All for One’s obsession with One for All, his narcissism and cruelty. Everything he did to the past users had been personal, and everything he did to build his empire in the meantime was brimming with violence. Mirio turned to Izuku as Sir Nighteye finished his own expository of All for One. Izuku had been content to listen and focus on the warmth of the tea through the cup seeping into his hands. Yagi was being careful of Izuku’s reactions, glancing over to check on him every so often. Izuku’s body was only getting more and more amped up.

“I don’t know how much of him you saw during your time with the League,” Mirio started, and Izuku realized the tea had gone cold in his hands. He struggled to keep his breathing steady. “But do you have anything to add? Anything you noticed?”

Yagi watched him carefully. When Izuku met his gaze, Izuku understood the gleam in his eyes. He wanted Izuku to tell Mirio. And since Sir Nighteye didn’t really know either, he would end up revealing the truth to him, too.

Izuku set his teacup down and took a steadying breath.

He stared at his hands curled in his lap. “When I met him, he was calm. Aloof.” Izuku thought of his smile as his tendrils shot forward, giving him Pull. “When I insulted him, he snapped to put me in my place. When my body stabilized with Pull, he was curious about *why*. He analyzed the possibilities and posed theories. He didn’t care about me at all aside from the answers I might be able to give him. He-” Izuku’s ironclad grip on his fear seemed to give out there but Izuku wasn’t done, damnit.

If he wanted to tell Mirio, he would. Afraid or not, others present or not.

“H-He,” Izuku started weakly. He cleared his throat, steeling himself. “He wanted to put another quirk inside me to see if I would be able to withstand it or become braindead like the other Nomu. And I say *other* because he included me as a Nomu. The only reason he didn’t…”

Izuku paused, his chest tightening, his breaths stuttering. It’s alright,

he told himself. Yagi wanted Mirio to know. Izuku wanted to lighten the weight in his chest.

“I asked him if All for One was like One for All,” Izuku said, hearing Mirio’s breath hitch. “He forgot about experimenting on me the moment I said it. He wanted to know how I knew about One for All. If… If I knew who Nine was.”

Silence built in the room, the severity of his confession dawning on Sir and Mirio. Yagi met his gaze and nodded subtly. Izuku expected his approval to be a relief but it only made the static in his ears whine louder.

“So,” Mirio began haltingly, his voice strained with forced calm as he glanced between Izuku and Yagi. “Does that mean he knows who I am?”

Izuku was glad he had put the teacup down.

If he hadn’t, he would probably have had to replace it for Yagi.

“What?” Izuku said, quiet as an unexpected amount of rage and *betrayal* crashed into him.

“Young Mirio-”

“I mean, it’s okay if he-”

“Why weren’t we informed he knew of Mirio-”

They all spoke at once, their voices overlapping. Izuku shouted over all of them.

“I would have *died* before giving you up to that monster,” Izuku snarled, the words coming out guttural and choked and *furious* as he stood and faced Mirio. “You hear me? I would never have told him your name.”

Mirio only looked confused, making the feeling storming inside of him thunder.

Did he think Izuku would just give him up? To a terror like All for One? What kind of friend did he think Izuku was? Did he think so little of him?

“But, if you didn’t give him my name…”

“Haiyama,” Sir said solemnly. “What’d he do to you?”

“Nothing I didn’t survive,” Izuku answered stiffly, feeling itchy and clammy, cold and hot all over. He wanted to get out of his skin, wanted to claw it off as they all looked at him with varying expressions of pity or regret or something else he didn’t care for.

“Is this why you’ve been avoiding me?” Mirio asked, his voice haunted and small.

Izuku looked away from him and nodded. “Yes.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I didn’t think it’d do anything good,” Izuku said. “I didn’t tell him anything and-”

“You were tortured!” Mirio yelled. “That’s what he did, right? All for One tortured you for my name.”

“Yes,” Izuku said.

“And you didn’t tell him,”

“No,” he snapped, his irritation spiking at being questioned again.

“When were you going to tell me?” Mirio asked. “Would you have said anything at all if I hadn’t brought it up?”

“I-I don’t know,” Izuku faltered. He had wanted to spare Mirio from the knowledge of All for One’s questions. He didn’t see the point in telling Mirio something that would only hurt him.

“You should have told me,” Mirio said, his face pinched in a scowl he directed at the floor. “You should have told me,” he repeated.

“I’m telling you now,” Izuku said, a brittle edge to his voice. The argument was weak and they all knew it. Izuku was about to crumble and by the looks of things, Mirio might be right there with him.

Mirio’s frown stayed in place as he made his way out the door.

“Woah, you don’t look good,” Hitoshi said, watching as Izuku pulled on his hero costume. An hour or so had passed since the meeting

Mirio planned and Izuku was not looking forward to patrol. Given the limited number of heroes at the Nighteye Agency, paired with the fact that Izuku didn't want to basically run away from Mirio, Izuku had the recipe for a very awkward, tension-filled patrol.

"Mirio and I had a fight," Izuku grumbled. "Don't ask."

"Damnit," Hitoshi cursed. "I thought you two were getting better."

Should've kept my mouth shut, Izuku thought. He had both years of experience keeping secrets and none at all at the same time. During the Apartment Years, no one really bothered with him aside from Bakugo, so it didn't really feel like he had anyone to tell about, you know, getting abandoned and sort of kidnapped as a child. Then the Hatsumes came along and all he had to do was dodge some questions before they backed off. And he didn't exactly have a choice in how the Yamazawas found out.

Maybe he was just actually bad at keeping secrets from people.

Maybe he wanted Mirio to know.

Either way, Izuku would rather not keep thinking about the fact that Mirio just assumed Izuku would willingly give him up to All for One. That stung far worse than Izuku could have prepared for. And he certainly hadn't prepared for it, seeing as telling All for One Mirio's name had never been a *fucking question.*

"Are you two going to be okay to patrol together?" Hitoshi prodded.

"It's not like we have another option," Izuku snapped.

He winced. Hitoshi wasn't part of this conflict and he certainly didn't deserve Izuku's animosity. "Sorry," he said, "Sorry. Yeah, I'll be professional."

Hitoshi nodded, "Good, let's just hope Mirio can be, too."

Things were going decently, barring the fact that Mirio was completely ignoring him. How the tables turn, huh? It was fine, Izuku told himself. Patrol was coming to an end soon, with the sun setting and casting long shadows down the street. He made Mirio deal with this for weeks, he could handle a little shunning. Hitoshi didn't try to

fill the silence this time, leaving them all in terrible, terrible silence. The sounds of the city and the occasional fan kept them from stewing too much but Izuku was seriously getting twitchy.

Quiet had never been his forte, alright? Not when he was a kid, isolated in an apartment. Not when he found a home in the Hatsume household, which was buzzing with noise every single second he was there. And not in the Yamazawa household, where the cats were moving or Aizawa was getting back from patrol, or Hitoshi was shuffling along, or Yamada was talking. The quiet meant he was alone and he wasn't right now, so could someone please just-

A building across the street exploded.

The blast slammed into them all, knocking everyone around off their feet. The three of them scrambled to stand to face the threat and make sure all the passing civilians were safe. A man stumbled into view from inside the crumbling building, hunched in on himself and twitching like crazy. He was wearing a simple suit, torn and dirty as it now was, and they watched as he crumpled in the street with a shriek.

"Help!" he screamed, *"Please, I don't know what's happening-"*

His hand hit the rubble in an attempt to steady himself but the moment his hand contacted the ground, everything exploded again.

Explode might not be the right word. Nothing was on fire, as far as Izuku could tell. The ground just seemed to burst and crack with the force of the man's quirk, sending everything flying.

"Sir, don't move!" Izuku shouted, panicking when a piece of the street shot past his arm. "If you touch anything, there'll be another explosion!"

He better be right. Please, let him be right. Mirio and Hitoshi were already moving toward the other people laying in the street. Izuku collected his bearings and stood to help but something tugged on his leg.

Izuku turned and saw a little girl with bright red eyes.

Eri kept her hand grasped around Surge's costume as tightly as she could. She had to make sure he went into that alley. She *had* to, or

else bad things would happen. She just had to say the things they told her to and- and everything would be fine.

“M-My dad needs help,” she said, trying to hide the tremor in her voice. Eri didn’t like how Surge’s face changed when he looked at her, his expression so much nicer than anyone she’s ever known. “H-He’s down there, please help him.”

“I will,” Surge assured immediately, “But I have to know if you’re hurt, okay? Do you need any help before I go to your dad?”

He wanted to know if she was hurt. *Her.* She was cursed, it didn’t matter if she was hurt, but he was asking her anyway. He wanted to *help* her.

Tears welled up in her eyes and overflowed quickly at the overwhelming wave of emotion that crashed through her. She tried to be quiet, tried to wipe away the tears, but they weren’t stopping.

Her voice wobbled, “You’re so nice,” she whispered, feeling so, so sad. “You just want to *help.”*

“Yeah,” Surge said softly, “‘Course I do.”

What would Chisaki and Dragon do to him if she led him down that alley? Would they strap him to the chair and take him apart over and over and *over* again? Would they leave him alone in a room for hours and only take him out so they could poke him with the needles until he felt like falling asleep?

“I can’t do it,” she cried. “I can’t make you like me.”

She was a horrible, cursed monster but she didn’t want Surge to come back with her, even if it meant she wouldn’t be alone anymore. Because taking him back with her would mean he would stay with her. Stay when they shut her in the room, stay when they turned off the lights before she was asleep.

Stay when they bound her to the chair and took her apart.

Would they take him apart, too?

Eri couldn’t let it happen. Not to a kind person like Surge.

“I lied,” she hurried to say, “Dragon is waiting in the alley.”

He froze, and in the second he stared at her, she worried that he

would hate her for trying to trick him. But his face didn't twist into something mean like Chisaki's would. He just took a deep breath and nodded.

"I'm glad you told me," he said, "I need you to find a friend of mine quickly, okay?"

Eri nodded and listened to his description of someone named Lemillion. She took off running and scrambled over the broken street with painful steps. Her feet bled more with each cut but Surge wanted her to hurry. Loud noises and flashing lights irritated her as big cars started pulling up to the demolished street and that's when she saw him.

"Lemillion!" she shouted as loud as she could. Her voice was sharp, the tone high from her fear and long-standing disuse.

Surge's friend was in front of her faster than she realized someone could move, asking her all sorts of questions.

"Surge needs help," she panted, stumbling over an explanation of what happened.

Lemillion paled and shouted for someone else. Another hero ran over to them, his purple hair sticking up as the bandages around his neck zipped back to him from their tasks.

"Surge is in trouble," Lemillion said, "Make sure she stays safe."

And then he was gone, and she was left alone with Surge's other hero friend.

"I leave him alone for two minutes," he muttered before turning to her with unbearably kind eyes. "Hi, I'm Pied Piper. Let's get your feet off this dirty street."

"Come out, *Dragon,"* Izuku shouted from outside the alley, his multi-pen support weapon ready to fire in his hands. "I know you're there."

From the shadows of the alley, his silhouette emerged, a slight glow from his eyes and throat calling forth Izuku's adrenaline.

"Stupid girl," Dragon hissed, smoke floated from his mouth as his

curled into a scowl. “Should’ve known she couldn’t listen.”

“Turn off your quirk and come quietly,” Izuku ordered, stomping on the fear crawling up his neck and crushing his chest.

Dragon laughed. “You can’t play hero when I know what you are, Izuku,”

“Yeah?” Izuku asked, pointing his weapon at him. “You think I care about your opinion of me? After all you’ve done?”

Sparks shot out of his mouth when he snarled. “All *I’ve* done?” he growled, the glow in his cheeks and throat brightening. “Everything I did, I did because you ruined my family. You’re an *abomination* ,” he spat. “A curse that needs to be snuffed out before you cause more damage.”

“I ruined the family?” Izuku said, incredulous and bitter. “You burned us! You choked us with your smoke! You ruined our family long before I got my quirk and you’re just using it as an excuse!”

“You and Inko needed to learn to listen to me,” Dragon seethed. “Your curse just showed me I had been doing it wrong.”

What? Had his vision in Izuku’s quirk said things that made him leave? What could his insecurities conjure to make him into this much of a quirkist fanatic?

In the split second of his shock, Dragon whipped out a gun of his own and fired. Izuku fired, too, Explode catching on Dragon shoulder when he tried to dodge the shot. Something hit Izuku’s neck, a prick followed by a larger impact made him stumble.

Izuku hissed at the pain it caused his scar and plucked the red bullet out of his skin.

Red?

Like the kind he saw…

When did he see something like this?

“We are going to cure you soon.”

Fire burned through him with a ferocity he couldn’t comprehend, branching from his neck to the rest of his body like gasoline had been thrown over his veins. Everything inside of him was scorched by the

feeling, burning away his thoughts and his senses with the pain that blazed through his bones.

Nothing he saw made sense anymore, nothing he felt could be understood through the filter of agony that was thrown over his mind.

"Don't worry," said a voice that sounded very far away. Contrary to the voice's words, Izuku found that he should be incredibly worried. *"That was just one of the temporary ones."*

When Mirio arrived at the alley the girl described, all he found was an empty street with a single red bullet and Izuku's gun laying in the rubble.

In her lab, Mei was sitting on her desk, revising her design blueprints for the exo-skeleton when an incredibly distinct alarm went off on her phone. Mei's head snapped towards the sound, her plans and machinery forgotten as she threw herself over to the workbench where her phone was buried under papers and trinkets. She swept them all off the table with her arms, uncaring of the loud bangs her things caused as they crashed to the ground.

Her phone blared and she finally unearthed it from the mountain of clutter. She opened her app and scanned the information it gave her. Zuzu was in the red zone, his vitals jacked up and his location moving through the city quickly.

But he was alive.

Mei bolted out of her lab, crashing through every doorway to the Hero buildings as she called her moms.

"Ma!" She said, "Get Mom and prepare for *war!"*

Shouta was having a quiet evening when the distant sounds of a tornado came hurtling towards his room. Several of his security

alarms went off in a sequence before his door was practically broken down and a heaving gremlin child stood on the remnants of his door.

“Zuzu’s been kidnapped,” she burst, lighting every nerve in his body on *fire*.

“What?” he snapped.

“I know where he is,” she held up her phone, showing where it tracked a moving pin across the city. “But you should probably hurry.”

Frankly, Mitsu didn’t give a shit that she and her wife were probably interfering with some laws. Mei had given them a location and a way to track Izuku as he was moved and they were going to find their son. Ayumi tied back her hair, a shining pair of brass knuckles clinking in her lap as Mitsu made a sharp turn. Mei said that Izuku was probably caught up in some bad shit and they believed her but there was a reason Izuku won his fights in the Sports Festival with his fighting skills.

Fighting skills he learned from *them*.

“I’m going to shatter their bones if they hurt him, Yumi,” Mitsu promised, her knuckles going white around the wheel. “I’m going to make them regret ever thinking they could take him.”

Ayumi made a noise of agreement, the odd and familiar cross between a growl and a warbling hum.

They caught up to the pin on the map, a large black car making its way down the street in an inconspicuous manner.

Mitsu cut it off and took the impact when she clipped the cars. The crash tossed them both off course but Mitsu took control of her car and rammed into the front of the car again before hopping out with Ayumi.

Ayumi slashed their tires and Mitsu tore open the front door.

She narrowly dodged a torrent of flames, a roar tearing from the mouth of the man in the car. He jumped out of the car, face alight with the glow of his quirk. Smoke trailed out from the sides of his

mouth as he zeroed in on her.

Mitsu blinked when she got a proper look at his face.

No fucking way…

“Are you Midoriya Hisashi?” she demanded, met with another jet of flames instead of an actual answer. “Are you Midoriya Hisashi?” she growled, charging at him.

He managed to burn her arm this time but she knocked him down. She slugged him hard, following with heavy jabs into his abdomen. She brought him close while he was stunned and kneed him in the groin before turning him around with his arms and kicking the backs of his knees. He bucked under her weight, heat radiating from his face but Mitsu held his neck down and twisted his arm at an uncomfortable angle, not caring in the slightest when her hand started blistering from the heat of his skin.

“Are you his father?” Mitsu snarled, “Yes or no, asshole.”

He tried to throw her off again and she squeezed his neck as she pulled on his arm some more, letting her nails dig into his skin. Fire blazed from his mouth, charring one of her knees and causing the heat of his neck to bite further into the skin of her hand.

She jolted and he whipped out of her grasp, tossing her onto asphalt and creating distance between them.

“I want no claim to that abomination,” he snapped. “He’s no son of mine.”

“You’re damn right he’s not,” Mitsu spat, standing despite the hell her leg gave her. “He’s *my* son, you hear? You’re a shit person and a shittier father and you will stay the *hell* away from my son.”

“He needs to be cured!” he shouted, his voice gravelly from his quirk. “He’s cursed!”

“Yeah, I’d call having you around a curse,” Mitsu said, her body tensing for round two. “I think I can cure that, though. What do you think?”

Ayumi ripped open the back doors of the car. Mitsu could take care of herself until reinforcements arrived and Ayumi had her brass on in case trouble came her way while she rescued Izuku. He was practically a grape compared to the things she could lift, no matter his weight, so she had been tasked with his retrieval while Mitsu got to beat someone up.

Izuku looked bad. His skin had taken on a sickly pallor, cold sweat collecting on his skin. A spot on his neck was hot and swollen and his breathing wasn't steady. Ayumi knew absolutely nothing about what happened to get them to this point but she knew he had been poisoned. By a drug or an actual poison, she wasn't sure, but she wasn't keen on taking chances. Not with her son and not when her wife's life was on the line.

Bolting to a hospital seemed like an excellent option, especially considering the lightshow happening where Mitsu was hopefully kicking the shit out of somebody. Mitsu could take care of herself but that didn't mean she would get out of all this unscathed and Ayumi could bet on some gnarly injuries based on the amount of heat coming her way from their fight.

"Yumi!" Mitsu yelled.

She caught sight of his shadow and dodged a shot of fire. Ayumi's skin felt stretched by the dryness caused by her new proximity to the heat. The man tried his hand at punching her but all he did was allow Ayumi to get in close. She deflected his punch and made use of her brass knuckles, listening to the satisfying sound of the metal smashing into his face. The back of her hand was singed from the heat of his skin, but that didn't stop her from kicking him clean off the ground and sending him back to Mitsu.

She hoped she broke his ribs.

Ayumi returned to the back of the car to grab Izuku and hightail it out of there. Izuku's body flinched when she touched him, but she didn't hesitate to sling him over her shoulder. She was pretty sure he threw up on her a little but that was fine. There were far worse things than bile and vomit that she had come into contact with.

With her son secured, Ayumi made a run for it, darting out of the relative cover of the car and sprinted down the street and around the corner.

Mitsu spat blood onto his face the moment he let her get too close. It actually boiled on his skin, which was not a great sign for her. Mitsu could fight like nobody's business but grappling was her strong suit and if he got too hot for her to grip onto, shit could get real nasty. Her knuckles were already blistered from the punches she managed to land on his face and the rest of her body wasn't doing too hot.

Well, it was actually *too* hot, but, anyway.

He could throw a decent punch, she could give him that because her face ached in testament to that particular skill, but he was shit at everything else. He relied on his quirk to do most of the heavy lifting and she was loath to admit that plan was going to work if she didn't manage to knock him down soon.

A good hit to his jaw should work as a quick knockout but she needed to get close to his front, which was a terrible idea on multiple fronts. But mainly two. Her hands were already fried, and hitting his face that close to the ol' lava bucket would further burn her hands. Hitting his jaw would also require getting right in front of him, putting herself right in the path of said lava bucket. She was liable to be turned into ashes and that was *not* on her bucket list.

Mitsu wanted to be alive to scold and hold her son.

And maybe have a conversation with Mei about who she currently has trackers in.

Asshole sperm donor was slowing down like she was, thank *god.* It seemed like shooting out that many flames took a toll on him.

Mitsu watched him.

His recharge period was longer now. He was running out of juice and all she had to do was outlast him, make him fire off more blasts until he could only throw smoke and sparks.

Mitsu rolled her shoulders and charged.

Ayumi ran into Aizawa during her dash through the streets, his car skidding with the shrieks of his tires from the abrupt halt of his racing

car.

“Is he alright?” he asked urgently.

Ayumi shifted Izuku a little so she could sign. *“Sick, maybe drugged. He needs a hospital.”*

He nodded, turning to Yamada. “Drive them to the nearest hospital, I’ll go help Mitsu.”

“Be safe,” Yamada ordered.

Aizawa ran off into the night and she ducked into the backseat with Izuku as Yamada quickly sat in the driver’s seat.

“Buckle up, I am going to break *many* traffic laws,” Yamada advised.

Wisely, Ayumi listened.

She ran at him right after he tried to barbeque her, slinging her fist at his chest first to steal his breath before socking his jaw.

The sound of his body hitting the pavement was better than Beethoven could ever hope to be.

She kicked him a few times for good measure before backing off and allowing herself to fall on her ass. Jesus, everything hurts.

A familiar scarf weaved around her downed opponent’s body and secured him, Aizawa stepping into view.

“Little late to the party, Aizawa,” she said. “You see Ayumi?”

“She and Hizashi are taking Izuku to the hospital,” he answered. “First responders should be here soon. They can help you and get you to them.”

“Is whatever the fuck this is going to follow him to the hospital?” Mitsu asked. “Please say no.”

“I don’t know,” he admitted regretfully. “But if it does, Hizashi and Ayumi won’t be the only protection he has. Other Pros got involved at the scene where this started. Apparently some guy was shot up with Trigger and his quirk caused a lot of damage.”

“I hate hospitals,” Mitsu said. “But mostly that our son keeps ending up in them.”

“So do I,” Aizawa said.

“You were really brave to do all that,” Hitoshi said to Eri. “Thank you.”

Her lip wobbled, more tears coming as she argued, “But I was going to trick him!” she cried, “I was going to let Dragon take him!”

Hitoshi swallowed the terror that clogged his throat and tried to comfort her. Her feet were all bandaged and Hitoshi was sitting in Sir Nighteye’s office with her. Eri told him all about Dragon’s plan and what they could do to Izuku. She didn’t seem to realize that it was important to him that they had done all of this to her, too, but he could deal with that later.

“But you didn’t,” Hitoshi emphasized, “You told Surge about the plan and came to us for help like he told you. Forget about the bad thing they told you to do and think about this good thing that you did all on your own.”

“Do- Do you really think I was brave?” she asked, swiping at the tears on her face.

“I do, Eri. And I’m really thankful for the decision you made,” He said. “I’m good friends with Surge so I’m glad you helped him.”

She looked up at him with her big eyes and sniffled. *“Surge* wanted to help me. I couldn’t let them make him like me.”

“They won’t,” Hitoshi said fiercely. Izuku had already been put through the wringer as a kid back when he was first experimented on and again when the League kidnapped him, the last thing he needed was to be taken apart by some psycho in a bird mask.

She kind of reminded him of Izuku when they first met. Izuku had been shaky in those first days, his whole world turned upside down as his life was picked apart by strangers. Izuku didn’t cry this much, but Eri was quiet like him. For all his discomfort in silence, Izuku had the tendency to meld with it when he was given the chance and Eri acted the same way.

Hitoshi chattered about other topics, lighter than human mutilation or kidnapping, and she let him fill the silence with his low voice. Eri nodded off against his arm, slumping into him with a tired yawn. Hitoshi let her fall asleep against him and wondered just how long he would have to wait for an answer to the only question that mattered to him.

After some time, Mirio walked through the doors, looking exhausted but relieved.

Hitoshi resisted the urge to shoot to his feet, tensing but keeping still for Eri's sake. "Is he-"

"Izuku's fine," he confirmed. "He's at the hospital but he's stable."

He sagged against his chair. "I'm never going to leave him alone again," Hitoshi promised, tipping his head towards the ceiling. "He's going to have to learn how to go through life with me adjoined to him all the time because the second I turn around, he gets into trouble."

Mirio gave a tiny laugh, but the sound was too weary so it ended up just being a really sad sigh.

Hitoshi wondered if the child next to him was too much of a flight risk to take to the hospital. Because Nighteye may object but he wasn't about to leave a kid alone in the agency. He also doubted that there wasn't some sort of medical issue that the EMTs didn't have the time or technology to deal with lingering in Eri's body. He would bring her to whatever hospital Izuku was taken to and meet up with Dad.

"How would you feel about accompanying me to the hospital?" Hitoshi asked.

"I'll get our things," Mirio answered promptly before disappearing to the locker rooms.

"What do you say?" Mei prodded annoyingly.

"Thank you, MeiMei," Izuku said, rolling his eyes.

"We will be having a talk about putting trackers in people," Mitsu chimed from her bed. For once, Izuku wasn't the one who needed to stay in a hospital bed. Trigger made him weak but the doctors said he

just needed to rest for a few days and get the drug out of his system. Mitsu, on the other hand, was nursing burns upon burns and the doctors wanted to make sure she didn't fall ill from an infection before they released her.

Mei scoffed. "It helped!"

"Yeah," she agreed, "but not all of us have a history of getting nabbed right off the street and I *know* Izuku isn't the only person you have getting tracked."

Izuku wanted to be offended but she was right. The police had taken their statements when it became clear they weren't going to die while they were being questioned and Izuku was sure that there was a report somewhere that stated how he literally got taken off the street.

"Yeah, I for one, would like to know if you injected something in my skin," Hitoshi said. "Or sewed something into my clothes. I have no idea what you did to Izuku."

The late night started to catch up to all of them now that the danger was gone. Izuku dozed on and off in the room until Yamada came in to take them back to UA. Mei, Hitoshi, Mirio, and Izuku all squeezed into the car with him and stumbled to their dorms with the teacher escorts that came to take Mirio and Mei to their separate buildings. Aizawa was apparently taking care of the little girl, Eri's situation.

Yamada pulled Izuku and Hitoshi into a hug before leaving.

"You gave us quite the scare, listener," he murmured into Izuku's hair. "Think you'll be fine for the rest of the night?"

Izuku nodded, melting into his warm embrace. "Yeah, Pops."

"You better be," Hitoshi warned. "Give me at least a few hours to sleep before you start being a trouble magnet again."

"I think about it," Izuku teased.

Inside his own room, Izuku crawled under the covers and let himself forget about everything that happened, if only for a while, as he drifted to sleep.

Izuku blinked his eyes open to inky darkness. In the corner of his eye, the darkness was disturbed by a distinct glow.

"Yo-'re b-ck," Inko said, her voice cutting in and out in tune with her wispy form.

"Hisashi shot me a few hours ago," he groused, rubbing at his neck and feeling out the old scar. "I think it was one of those quirk erasing bullets. I was advised not to try and use either quirk until I stopped feeling weak. But, if I'm here, does that mean Trigger went after Insecurity first?"

Inko shook her head. *"In-curity hi-s,"* she said.

"What?" Izuku asked, not entirely sure what she said.

"It kn-ws w-en some-ng wan-s it g-ne," Inko tried to explain. *"It -des."*

"I-" Izuku watched as she flickered in and out of his sight. "Wait, I don't understand!"

Inko smiled, a dreadful gleam in her eyes. *"Pull c-n't hid-, you've n-ver tried to su-ress it."*

Realization and understanding dawned on Izuku as he pieced her words together. Questions he didn't have time for arose, too. How the hell did that work? He messed up his quirk so bad it actually gained sentience?

Well, he didn't really have room for questions, considering he was getting this information from the sentient quirk of a dead woman.

"But if Trigger went after Pull, what am I doing here?"

"P-ll is com-ng bac-," she said.

"So, it's like when All for One first gave me Pull? Can I only come here when I'm adjusting to Pull?"

She shrugged, *"I d-n't know. I'm s-rry."*

"Will I see you again?" Izuku rushed out, distress curling in his chest as he watched Inko flicker in the darkness.

Inko's ghostly form glitched, her expression melancholy. She didn't have an answer for him. Not for this. Still, she opened her mouth to say something.

“I l-ve yo-”

Izuku startled awake, alone in his dorm.

Chapter End Notes

you know, I was originally going to make the mirio arguement a bit worse but it seemed ooc for mirio to be saying the dialogue I wrote so I tried to tone it down

Also, more fake quirk science. Don't think too much about it because I have no foundation to stand on

Righto, bye lovelies! Thanks for the kudos and comments

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